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In his book *Greek Fire*, André Michalopoulos recalls how, during the grim days of the Axis invasion of his country, he used to derive inspiration and hope from the London broadcasts of Herbert Hodge, author of *Cab, Sir!* and *It's Draughty in Front*.

In *A Cockney on Main Street*, Mr. Hodge tells the story of his one-man mission to America. No wiser decision could have been made than to send this philosophical, sincere and humorous-minded taxi-driver to tell the United States something about what was happening in this country. Hodge wisely decided that he could not go as a "British propagandist beating the big drum." But that he must go as a citizen of the world who happened to be born in Britain, to tell his fellow citizens what was happening down his street, and to take a look for himself of what was happening down theirs. The things he writes about are the little things—the little things that he saw, said, heard, did and thought during his visit. The result is a book that does more for Anglo-American relations, both of the present and of the future, than any number of official pronouncements.

A COCKNEY
ON MAIN STREET



By the same author

IT'S DRAUGHTY IN FRONT

A. G. MACDONELL (*The Observer*)

"Mr. Herbert Hodge is one of those rare, remarkable, and, to professional writers, irritating people who become extremely good writers when there is no reason, according to all the set rules why they should be . . . he touches ordinary life at so many points from first-hand experience, and he always has something fresh to say."

G. W. STONIER (*New Statesman*)

"Candour is so rare in writing that one comes even to dissociate it from talent. Mr. Hodge is a really candid writer; that, one might say, *is* his talent. His unpretentious pages give the clear picture of a sensitive, practical, thrusting, timid, stupid and intelligent man. Yes, Mr. Hodge contradicts himself—and convinces us."



CAB, SIR ?

EVENING NEWS

"It should be as successful as his earlier autobiography, *It's Draughty in Front*. Because Mr. Herbert Hodge is an acute observer, has a charming wit and can tell a good story like a house on fire. The book is full of good stories."

A. T. G. EDWARDS (*Western Mail*)

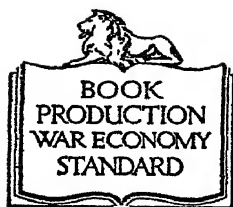
"Those who listen to Mr. Hodge's delightful broadcasts, and readers of his autobiography, *It's Draughty in Front*, should hardly need telling twice to get his new book, *Cab, Sir?* . . . I shall long have the warmest and pleasantest recollections of this book."

HERBERT HODGE
A
COCKNEY
ON
MAIN STREET



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for
MIDGE

★

INVITATION TO AMERICA



THE invitation to America was unexpected. I was driving a bus at the time, and had been doing so for a twelvemonth, under the Essential Work Order. When this lecture invitation arrived, therefore (from the American Workers' Education Bureau via the Ministry of Information), I did not allow myself to get too excited about it. It might be easy enough for a college professor or a member of parliament to get a few months' leave to visit the States, but I knew so important a person as a busdriver couldn't so easily be spared.

The Ministry optimistically suggested I should ask my employers for five months' leave of absence. I did so. But my employers, as I had expected, said it was "impracticable."

I applied to the Ministry of Labour for permission to leave the job entirely. They said it would be all right with them provided the Foreign Office (in conjunction, I think, with the Ministry of Home Security) granted me a permit to leave the country. My employers continued to oppose the idea—"on principle," they said; but what the principle was they didn't explain.

Some months later, when I'd given up hope, and my employers, I feel sure, had decided I'd been trying to take them on with a cock and bull story (if they'd bothered their heads any more about it), everything suddenly came clear. I received my passport, exit permit and release; and my employers, though still opposed to the idea, relented so far as to say that, if they had any vacancies when I came back, they would be willing to employ me again—at beginner's rate.

A few more weeks went by, and then one day the Ministry of Transport, in their careful wartime phraseology, informed me that "an opportunity" had occurred. I went to the London offices and was made a fuss of by one of the officials there; but, quite unwittingly, I spoiled it.

He was telling me what a splendid ship I should be going on, and had got to the part where he hoped I would understand I couldn't have *all* of its luxuries in wartime, when I interrupted him to say I was quite used to roughing it at sea. I went on to tell him I had travelled in one of this company's cattle boats some twenty years before—in the fo'c's'le. And I described it.

I was just in the middle of explaining that I didn't mind eating my grub rough but did object to eating it rotten, when I noticed, to my surprise, that his face was getting red. It seemed he was only a wartime government official, and in peacetime a high official in this same shipping company. I

hastened to add that I hadn't meant anything personal; I simply thought he'd be interested to hear about my adventures. And he said yes, of course; he quite understood. But a definite chill had come into the atmosphere, and our parting handshake was nothing like as cordial as our greeting had been.

When I presented myself early one morning at the shipping office at "a northern port," I found there were still a few more forms to fill in, mainly a restatement of what I had stated so often on other forms. During these four months, from mid-April to the beginning of August, I had filled in so many forms, and answered so many ambiguously phrased questions in so many slightly different ways, that I now began to wonder what would happen if anyone read and compared them. I should surely seem a liar. And if no one was proposing to read and compare them, why did they keep asking me to fill in more?

After I had duly filled in this batch, I was taken into a small private room and introduced to an elderly doctor. He chatted with me for a few minutes about my trip, then felt my pulse and wished me good luck. The clerk then told me to go and sit down in the main office until he should call me.

It was a huge office, looking rather like a large bank, except that there was no metal grille at the counter. Many others besides myself seemed to be awaiting ships; among them a number of young naval officers. There was also a file of seven men, each wearing a black suit and a black hat, and with a bluely bristly jowl. They were all alike, and yet each was different; and whatever they did, they did in unison. When I first caught sight of them, they were filing over to the counter. The leader of the file spoke with the clerk, then spoke back over his shoulder to the man behind him, and he to the man behind him, and so on down to the man at the end—so that from where I sat, out of earshot, it looked like a ripple going down the back of a snake. They were obviously not English; probably members of a Continental religious order.

I like to kid myself I'm not superstitious, but that snaky black file scared me. I found myself hoping from the bottom of my heart that they weren't going to travel on the same ship as I was. For if ever there were seven black Jonahs all in a row, I was sure I was seeing them then. An unreasonable and ridiculous feeling, I know; but it came up from the depths, swamping reason.

An hour or so later I saw them filing off again, in charge of a clerk. Off to a ship, I hoped, and away.

And when my own clerk called me over some time afterwards and told me my "opportunity" had been cancelled, I wasn't so completely cast down as I otherwise should have been. He could give me no definite news of another opportunity, but advised me to be at the office by eight the next morning. He was a lively chap, with an enormous smile, which he flashed before every speech, no matter what its purport. Considering the

shipping situation at that time (1942) he probably deserved a V.C. for that smile. On the other hand, I noticed it got on some people's nerves; especially when his news was bad.

He greeted me with it again the next morning, as he planked down another wad of forms on the counter before me. When I asked if I was likely to be going soon, he said he couldn't say; meanwhile if I'd just fill in these. . . .

I looked them over. They seemed the same as those of the day before, except that yesterday's had been stamped "Cabin" and these were stamped "Tourist." I suggested that he could save a lot of trouble by stamping yesterday's "Tourist." But at that suggestion even his smile went. He shook his head at me; shocked. I might have been suggesting forgery.

When I'd finished them, doing my best to duplicate the previous day's answers, he smiled his approval and said all that now remained was to see the doctor.

I reminded him I'd seen the doctor yesterday.

He smiled as on a charming but rather stupid child. "Don't you see!" he said. "It's another ship."

I said I didn't see, but he took my elbow and ushered me along to the private room. It was, at any rate, another doctor. Whether he believed in giving greater value for money, or whether, now that I was labelled tourist instead of cabin, my health was more suspect, I don't know; but he had my shirt up and did me carefully with a stethoscope. He seemed to take a poor view of me; but he didn't say I couldn't go, so I presumed I was at least well enough to travel. I came out into the main office again and sat down to wait on a long upholstered bench.

It was evidently the going-away bench; for a short time later, I was joined by a man and a woman, and then by a young naval officer. Then the clerk came over, swept all four of us with his smile, and told us to accompany him. He led us outside to a small single-deck bus, in which, with him and a number of uniformed officials, we were driven down to the docks.

For the first time in two days, it had stopped raining, and the sun was out, glistening on the drab wet streets. As we bumped slowly through the crowded docks, held up here and there by swing bridges, with loaded lorries and rattling cranes all round us, and the occasional ugly relics of an air-raid, I tried to absorb every detail of the scene, for I felt this might be the last time I should look upon land. But though my head was full of fond farewells, my stomach was much too busy straining to reach the shore on the other side to allow me to feel romantic.

We finally stopped alongside a wharf, through which the clerk led us to the dockside and up a short, steep gangplank on to the deck of what looked to me to be an extraordinarily small ship for an Atlantic crossing. A scruffy looking old ship, she was, too. But I had no time then to look her over. We followed the clerk across the wet and slippery deck, dodging

in and out among the bales, boxes, wire ropes and busy men, and into a low, narrow doorway amidships, and so into the saloon. It was broad and low, running the whole width of the superstructure, with two long tables, an upholstered seat running round the walls, and some half-dozen swivel chairs, on the inner side of the tables, bolted to the deck. Its two portholes looked out toward the bows. It was a pleasant place, panelled in dark wood, and reminding me of the low-ceilinged bar-parlour of an old country pub; small, solid and cosy.

Sitting at one of the tables was an Immigration official, and standing on guard over us was a dock security policeman in khaki battledress, with a revolver strapped to his waist. One by one we went up to the table and were interrogated.

There were no more forms to fill in; merely an oral recapitulation of what had previously been written, while the Immigration Officer looked through our papers.

While this was going on, a tall elderly steward, in white jacket and apron, was busy laying the other table for a meal; and when everything was settled, and the officials all gone, the clerk and our four selves sat down to eat. It was a gloriously unrationed meal, with grapefruit and unlimited butter and several kinds of cold meat. Over it, we got to know each other, and heard from the clerk something about the ship. She was a Norwegian, a small freighter, bound for Montreal. We four were the only passengers.

Douglas, the young naval lieutenant who was to be my cabin mate, was a Canadian—one of a number of volunteers who had come over to join the British Navy early in the war. His first taste of war had been at Dunkirk. Since then he had been on a destroyer, escorting coastwise convoys in the North Sea. He was now going home on leave.

The other man (whom his wife, and then we, called Wally) was a Czech, in his middle thirties; a doctor. He had got away from Prague just before the Germans got in, and had since been working in a London hospital. There he had met and married his wife, a nurse. She told us her name was Anastasia—for friends: Stasia. Wally said he had hoped to settle in England after the war, but there was some doubt as to whether the B.M.A. would allow refugee doctors to practice, so he and his wife had thought it best to take advantage of the chance that had come their way to emigrate to the States. Wally was bitter about being welcomed to work all through the blitz and then being grudged a living afterwards. Stasia said nothing.

After the meal, the clerk, looking extremely pleased with himself (as who wouldn't after that magnificent feed?) said good-bye and went ashore. The elderly Norwegian steward, who was also a smiler, but a fatherly one, showed us to our cabins. There were only four in that part of the ship: a fairly large one for the captain, with bathroom attached, and three small ones. The one Douglas and I were to share was about eight feet by six; impossibly small at first glance, yet a marvel of accommodation when you examined it. There were two bunks, one above the other, under the port-

hole; a small corner cupboard, a miniature settee, a combination writing-desk and chest-of-drawers, a narrow cabinet, from the middle of which a small washbasin could be opened out; and, in the centre, taking up most of the remaining space, a large swivel chair.

I was delighted with it. Just we four, and a neat little ship to ourselves. It was a thousand times better than being one of a crowd on a luxury liner.

Douglas wasn't so pleased. "She looks to me like an old last-war rush job," he said. "And she's probably empty except for a bit of sand for ballast. We'll know all about it if we run into bad weather. Do you think you're going to be sick? It's going to be hellish in here if one of us is sick."

I said I'd never been seasick yet, but then of course you never knew.

Douglas grunted. "If you don't mind," he said, "I think I'll be on the safe side, and take the upper berth."

Which suited me very well, since it meant no clambering up and down. This arranged, Douglas went off to look around the ship, while I stayed in the cabin, examining the fittings, and slowly letting the cork ease up out of the neck of my excitement.

I undid my two suitcases, and began to sort out what I should need on the voyage. We had decided to keep only what we actually needed in that little cabin, and to put the rest of our stuff down in the lazarette.

I had just put my pyjamas on the settee and was shaking the creases out of my Sunday suit when Douglas poked his head round the door.

"As I thought," he said. "Built by Vickers, Montreal, in 1918. And our one gun is 1918, too." Then his eye fell on the settee. "Don't you think you're tempting Providence?"

I stared at him. "But everything's all right now, surely?"

He shrugged. "We haven't started yet."

The implications of his tone took the heart out of me. I could neither go on unpacking nor pack up again. I left my things as they were, and followed him to the saloon, where Wally and Stasia were sitting on two of the swivel chairs, looking downcast, and the shipping clerk was standing in the middle of the floor, his smile all gone.

"Well," said Douglas, "what about it?"

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know." And he turned his back on us.

I asked Douglas what the trouble was. He said the ship might not be leaving that day, and we should probably be put ashore again. It seemed the dock security police refused to allow passengers to stay aboard overnight.

The clerk, after standing for some time with his back toward us, staring out on deck, suddenly walked off. We four waited miserably in the saloon. Even another unrationed meal failed to cheer us.

Apart from our disappointment, we were faced with the problem of paying for our night's lodging. We were allowed to take only ten pounds out of the country, so that was all we now had. And we'd all got to travel

overland on the other side before we could get any more: Douglas to Toronto, I to New York, and Wally and Stasia clear to the Pacific coast.

A short time later the clerk came back and confirmed our fears with a gloomy nod. Douglas asked whether the shipping company had made any lodging arrangements to cover cases like ours—which must have been fairly common at that time. The clerk shook his head, and primly reminded us that among the many forms we had signed, and presumably read before we signed, was one that absolved the shipping company from all responsibility. The Immigration Officer then arrived, accompanied by his armed escort, and cancelled the embarkation permits he had stamped on our passports a few hours before. We were then shepherded ashore. The one hopeful sign was that we had been allowed to leave our luggage on board.

Wally and Stasia decided to go to the Immigration Office to see if they could get back some of the money they had given up—for there was no telling how many nights we might have to spend ashore like this before the ship sailed. Douglas and I hurried to the hotel to get a room before they were all gone. It was now late afternoon, and we were only just in time. There was one room left; fortunately a double one. We decided to share it.

But while we were discussing it with the girl at the desk, I was conscious of repressed excitement behind us: a whispered "*P-s-s-t! P-s-s-t!*" then some urgent finger snapping.

I glanced over my shoulder. There was only the hall porter. And he was standing quite still with a faraway look in his eyes.

The girl glanced up from the card she was making out: "Where's your luggage?"

Douglas indicated the strap of his haversack, slung over his shoulder. I indicated the strap of mine.

"That's not luggage," she said. "If you've got no luggage you'll have to pay in advance."

The price was thirty-five shillings, but we had to give her three pounds before she'd let us have the key of the room. There was no telling what we might order, she explained, once we got inside.

Considering we'd both just stayed two nights at this hotel and paid our way, this struck me as being a bit unreasonable. Even if she hadn't recognized us, she'd got the evidence before her in the register. And why a suitcase should be trustworthy, and a haversack suspicious, I couldn't understand. Later, I found American hotels acted on the same principle.

The next morning we got down to the shipping office early, and with Wally and Stasia were taken aboard the ship again. When we entered the saloon, I got a shock. Standing in the middle of the floor was a grim, middle-aged female. Perhaps I'm more than usually fearful of grim females. But this one, from her pompadoured hair, through her tightly laced stays, down to her heavily shod feet, was so very, very grim; and with such a grim look in her eye that when it caught mine I wilted. For a

few awful moments, I thought she was about to become our fellow-passenger. Then her presence was explained.

It seemed the Immigration officials, a different set from those of the day before, were determined to make a thorough job of us, and particularly of Wally and Stasia. Wally, of course, was an alien. And now that Stasia had married him, I suppose she was an alien, too, in spite of her Scottish birth and unmistakable Scottish accent. They were both taken away to be searched.

I got a bit worked up about it; perhaps because I was about to become an alien myself when I got to the other side. If I'd been in Stasia's shoes, and that Female Searcher had laid a hand on me, I'd —— But what? I'd have done the same as Stasia, I suppose. Put up with it. There wasn't anything else to do.

The Immigration Officer, however, gave me something different to think about. The one who had examined us the day before had been everything an official should be: efficient, courteous and helpful. This one was merely super-efficient. So I was leaving the country, was I? *Why* was I leaving the country? And so on, and so on, for what seemed to me at least the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time—until at last he thought he'd caught me.

How much money had I? Ten pounds? What! *Still* ten pounds? After last night? How come, how come? He didn't actually accuse me of lying on the previous day, but the sneer in his tone said everything.

Glorying in this opportunity to step right in and score a bull's-eye, I explained that, fearing I might have to stay at the hotel for several days, I had put through a call to London, and got the M.O.I. to take care of my hotel bill. (On London's instructions I had gone round to see their local official and he had given me a letter, on the strength of which the hotel girl had given me my money back.)

The Immigration Officer did not look as shamefaced on hearing this as I had hoped. Nor did he apologize. All the same, I felt it was a glorious victory.

As it turned out, we all still had our ten pounds. Wally and Stasia had been unable to get any of their money back from the Immigration Office (because it had been immediately sent off to the friends they had named) but they had managed to get through the night without spending anything. At first, they had decided to spend the night in the railway waiting room, but had found it already crammed full. They then decided to walk the streets but, in the early hours of the morning, rain and weariness drove them into a police station. The police knew the address of a countryman of Wally's, and he let them have a bed for the remainder of the night. But they weren't lucky enough to get anything to eat. Douglas had managed to persuade a local (naval) tailor to cash a cheque for him.

At last the examinations came to an end; our luggage was given a final run through, our passports were restamped and handed back to us, and

the little group of officials, led by the Female Searcher, filed out of the saloon.

We four looked at each other. The desire was plain on every face; strong to speed the parting guests. But no one spoke. We dared not. Silently, we lit cigarettes, and stood waiting.

The steward came in and began to lay the table for another of his glorious meals. We sat down to eat. Suddenly, I sensed a new feeling in the ship. Hitherto it had been dead; still as a steel house. Now there was pulsation.

"I believe we're moving," said Douglas.

We both jumped up and went out on deck. The wharf was slowly sliding back and away. Ahead of us, a much bigger ship was gradually swinging round until her bows pointed toward the opening dock gates. Above and below and all round us in the crowded dock, men were shouting orders. Slowly, very slowly, our own ship swung out, nosing in the wake of the ship ahead.

And then, for the first time since I'd received that invitation to America, I knew, beyond any possible shadow of doubt, that I could allow myself to believe in it.

2

CONVOY



A FEW hours later we were meeting the other ships of our convoy, most of them much bigger than our own. When we were all in place, our position was that of leading ship starboard (front row, on the extreme right-hand side).

"Which means," said Douglas, "they reckon we're practically valueless. If a sub sees the convoy coming, we cop the first torpedo. They put the valuable ships in the middle."

That evening, our Norwegian captain came into the saloon for dinner; and, after dinner, told us how to conduct ourselves in case of attack. If we were out on deck, we were to go straight to our cabins, put on our lifejackets and then await orders in the saloon. If we were already below, we should stay there until told to do otherwise. And he advised us to sleep with our trousers on.

When we turned in, Douglas suggested we should hook the cabin door open. "If we get hit," he explained, "it's liable to jam."

I liked Douglas. If there's one thing that gives me more than my fair share of the jitters in times of danger it's being in the company of a self-

blinking optimist who tries to laugh it off, and scorns precautions as an admission of fear. Douglas was more my own type. He liked to know the worst, and to make such preparations as were possible to meet it. Then, and only then, he could settle calmly to normal everyday affairs until the actual presence of danger demanded his attention.

I had thought I might have some difficulty in getting off to sleep under the circumstances. But once I had prepared myself as well as I could—trousers and socks on, boots and haversack within reach, lifejacket under my pillow—I fell off to sleep very easily. The ship's motion helped me in that—up, and a slight roll, and down; up, and a slight roll, and down—rhythmic and delicious. It was good to be at sea again after twenty years. It was good, too, to be free of the responsibility of a busload of passengers in the blackout. I snuggled under the blanket, thinking how lucky I was.

The next I knew was the arrival of the steward with a cup of tea.

There wasn't room for both Douglas and I to get up at the same time; or at least, there wasn't room for the outflinging of arms and elbows necessary for dressing. So we took it in turns. On that first morning, I was first up, and went out on deck for a look round before breakfast.

There were some forty ships in the convoy—British, American, Greek, Norwegian; ships of all sizes and ages. We made quite a spread upon the sea; but not a beautiful spread. We were a dirty, rusty, smoky looking lot. And most of us were unladen, and so travelling high out of the water, which didn't improve our appearance—though, during the first few days, while we were still within range of Nazi planes, the kite each ship flew to upset the attacker's aim gave us quite a gay look, like a crowd of unwashed motor mechanics and miners out on the spree.

By comparison, the trim, grey, clean-cut uniformity of the escorting destroyers and corvettes made me feel unshaven.

The Captain, who had joined me at the rail, took a different view from Douglas regarding the reason for our position in the convoy. He explained the difficulty of keeping station at night without lights. Each ship had to depend on the one immediately ahead for guidance. Therefore it was important to have the most experienced and reliable seamen on the leading ships. If one leading ship went wrong during the night, there'd be a whole file of ships next morning possibly miles from the convoy. And, since the use of radio would give them away to the subs, there was little hope of their picking the convoy up again. Our own position as leading ship starboard, was a particularly difficult one, because we were not only a leader, we were the leader of an outside file, and therefore could lose touch with the convoy much more easily than those leading ships which had a ship on either side of them.

I preferred the Captain's view; it gave us prestige.

One of the minor difficulties of keeping station was due to the fact that some of us had steam engines and some had diesels. The steamers were the more flexible. Our own ship, for instance, could vary her speed

by half a revolution of her propeller, whereas the much bigger ship immediately behind us, with diesel engines, could vary hers only by a whole revolution—with the result that she was sometimes too far behind, in danger at night of losing contact, and sometimes too close, with her huge bows towering high above our little stern as if about to crash down upon us.

One tiny ship in the second line, a midget, built for navigating the locks of the upper St. Lawrence, and bound for one of the Lake ports, was followed by an enormous, rusty Greek. And her captain apparently trusted the Greek so little that, every evening as darkness fell, he dropped back and let the Greek take the lead. And every morning we were treated to the slightly comic spectacle of her fussing up again, in a smother of spray, to claim her rightful place.

Those were some of the difficulties I noticed, thankful that the responsibility of bringing the ship across was not mine. The Captain seemed never to sleep. It didn't matter what time of the day or night you happened to be on deck, sooner or later, he always turned up at your side: ready for a smoke and a talk in the daytime; and at night quietly intent on the misty darkness beyond the rail. I don't think he undressed throughout the voyage.

He was a short, stout, ginger-haired man, in his fifties; and though willing, and I think glad, to relax occasionally with us passengers, he kept himself completely aloof from his crew. I never saw him speak to one of them except to give an order—and that order in the fewest possible words: quick and curt. He lived shut away in his own part of the ship—alone with his responsibility. Perhaps it was necessary for discipline that he should keep himself so. There seemed no doubt of it in his mind. And he surely knew best. But by nature he was a warmly companionable man, and this solitude must have come hard.

In the afternoons, you'd see him up on the deck amidships, his short legs planted wide apart, his peaked cap tilted over one eye, a Sweet Caporal cigarette in his mouth, looking proudly over his little ship, master of all he surveyed. He seemed no more than a boy then, with a boy's delights and a boy's ardours. Later, after the evening meal in the saloon, sitting with cap off and jacket unbuttoned, he was the father of the family—telling us perhaps of pre-war days with his wife and children in Norway (he'd had no word from them since the German invasion) and smiling paternally on Stasia as she sat darning his many weeks' accumulation of worn socks.

But all this with only half his mind; as was evident when Douglas or I reached for our communal bottle of whisky. It was the one thing, I think, that scared him. It would have been so very easy to have made a friend of the whisky bottle.

"Not for me," he'd say. "Not till the end of the voyage. I mustn't."

As the evening drew on, you could see the change in him. It was as

though each minute in its passing laid another year on him, transforming the boyishly proud captain of the afternoon into the careworn man of the night. The offer of a drink and the refusal would bring him to his feet—still chatting but uneasily pacing up and down. Then on would go his cap, and he would button up his jacket as though buttoning up his spirit for the coming watch. If it had been a fine day, with good visibility, making it easier for a lurking submarine to pick us up, he would say, with a wry smile: "It's pants night to-night"—meaning we should sleep with our trousers on. Then he would bid us good night and go out on deck.

Wally, Douglas and I tacitly took it in turns to stay up with him until sleepiness sent us below. We were, of course, carefully casual about it, even between ourselves. He seemed to like our company. On the dark deck, or up on the bridge with its dimly glowing binnacle, and the steersman like a ghost above it, the two of you would no longer be captain and passenger, but friend and friend. And though you couldn't share his responsibility, you could at least help him to support the weight.

Looking out into the misty darkness, in which one sensed rather than saw the faintly darker darkness that was the next ship—always looking out—he would talk of previous convoys. He had done twenty-six wartime transatlantic crossings (and many more, I hope, since). He would tell of convoys which the subs had followed at a safe distance all day, and come in to attack at night. Coming in and getting two ships one night; three, perhaps, the next; following them day after day; killing night after night; until the convoy reached the other side with maybe only half the ships that had started out.

And one night he suddenly became angry, cursing the intolerable slowness of our convoy, and taking me into the chart room, spread out the charts on the table, and showed me the course he would have taken—in the certainty, he claimed, of dodging submarines—if only the regulations had permitted him to go on his own. Not that I understood his charts, or his proposed course. But I felt privileged to be shown them, and the showing put him in a good humour with himself again.

I found it very difficult to keep awake after midnight. Besides, as this staying up with him was firmly accidental, it would have been a mistake to overdo it. And after a last cigarette in some corner sheltered from the wind, our hands carefully cupped over the glowing ends, we'd say good night and I'd go below.

For me, every night was pants night. I couldn't bear the thought of having to rush for the boats without my trousers. But Douglas, once we were out of range of Nazi planes, preferred to luxuriate in silk pyjamas—sleeping in his trousers only when the captain specifically advised it.

The crew seemed to feel much the same about being prepared as I did. No matter what task a man was engaged on about the decks, you'd always see his thick wad of personal papers, in what looked like a waterproof case, sticking out of the back pocket of his trousers. You felt they were

all set to take to the boats at any moment. Two of our boats were off the davits, lying on deck; the idea being, I gathered, that if we went down with a rush, these two at least would float clear. There was also a raft; an openwork frame affair with loops of rope round the sides. I didn't fancy it. I hoped if we did get sunk, the sinking would be slow enough to permit my getting into one of the two fairly roomy motorboats.

But as it turned out we had only two bits of excitement, and neither of them lethal. One morning, about a week out, we saw a smudge of smoke ahead of us on the horizon, and a destroyer and a corvette went rushing off to investigate. I remembered, on the day before we left England, there was a paragraph in the paper stating that a surface raider was believed to be at large in the Atlantic. I passed on this choice bit of news to the others as we stood watching. But as the stranger's hull came into sight over the curved rim of the horizon, our captain said he thought he recognized her. And when she came closer, shepherded towards us by destroyer and corvette, like a couple of intelligent dogs bringing in a recalcitrant sheep, he was sure. She was a fast Norwegian freighter, he told us, travelling alone. He knew her captain. Her sister ship had been torpedoed a few weeks previously, and the captain, now without a ship, had taken over this one for a voyage, while her regular captain, who'd just got married, went on his honeymoon.

But our escorts were taking no chances. The destroyer was signalling with a lamp. The oncoming ship swung round till she was broadside on to the convoy. Then, while the destroyer kept her guns trained on her from one side, the corvette, on the other side, lowered a boat and boarded her.

A few minutes later, the boat pulled back to the corvette; there were more signals from the bridge of the destroyer, and the stranger and ourselves were on our ways again, in opposite directions.

The other bit of excitement occurred a few days later, just before lunch. Wally, Douglas, the Captain and I were in the saloon when Stasia came rushing in from the deck. "They're firing," she said.

We all rushed out, just in time to see the spouts of underwater explosions near a corvette away out on the horizon on our side of the convoy. At the same instant our own gun went off, followed by what sounded like everything in the convoy, heavy guns, machine-guns and all.

Considering that what everyone was firing at was on our side of the convoy, I didn't feel too happy about it. It seemed to me that, with the guns of some forty or more ships all trained in our direction, we were as likely to be hit as the target. It was a hellish racket while it lasted.

Whether the corvette had found a sub, or whether it was just a practice, I don't know. And, for once, the Captain seemed not to know either. Douglas said the explosions we saw near the corvette were depth charges. Anyhow, it was reassuring to think of afterwards. The racket made by all those guns suggested that though, alone, we might be very poorly armed, the crowd of us together could put up a formidable defence.

CONVOY

The rest of the trip was peaceful; and the weather mainly as the Captain liked it, wet and misty, so that we steamed along all day within our small sphere of grey sea and clouded sky with very little likelihood of being sighted from a distance.

We ate our three unrationed meals a day, took our stroll along the wet and windy deck, or sat in the cosy saloon, telling each other our more comic or interesting experiences in England, Canada, Czechoslovakia and Norway, while the housewifely Stasia helped the steward to lay the table and to wash up, darned our socks, washed our "smalls," and generally mothered us.

And then, one day, when we were all getting a little tired of our grey round bowl, the Captain announced that we were near the Canadian coast. A few hours later, we were given permission to leave the convoy (which was apparently bound for a port further south) and to cut across to the coast on our own—there to wait for another convoy going up the St. Lawrence.

The land, as we approached it, had a different look from the land we'd left, but it was difficult to define the difference, just as it was difficult to define the difference between the Canadian pilot we now picked up, and his English prototype. The land itself seemed more golden, and the vegetation more bluey green; it was as New World as Fenimore Cooper. And our pilot seemed a bigger, burlier man than you'd pick up at Liverpool or Southampton; more of a wide-open-spacer.

Once we were safely at rest within the harbour, the Captain opened a bottle of brandy, and we thankfully celebrated. Then he said he might have to wait some days for a Montreal convoy, and there was no sense in our staying aboard and again risking submarines when we could finish our journey by train. He'd see if he could get permission for us to land.

He went off in a motorboat, and returned with the appropriate set of officials who, like all the Canadian officials I met, gave us a warm welcome. Early next morning we four were on the train for Montreal. There we said good-bye to Douglas. Wally, Stasia and I took the night train to New York.

3

CITY OF TO-MORROW



WE arrived at Pennsylvania Station, New York, at eight-fifteen in the morning, just in time to become involved in the morning rush hour. After saying good-bye to Wally and Stasia on the platform, I looked around for a porter. The train was crowded, and there were many cries for porters,

and from my end of the train, the rear end, there was none to be seen. I had only one suitcase with me (the other one I had "checked" through from Canada), but I felt I needed a porter, if only to guide me to the baggage office to get this second suitcase, and then to a cab. However, as there was none to be had, I picked up my bag, slung my haversack, raincoat and overcoat over my shoulder, and followed in the general direction of the crowd.

At first sight, Penn Station was disappointing. I had heard so much about the grandeur of American railroad stations, and this place where my train had pulled in was a dark and dirty tunnel, grimmer than Euston or King's Cross; simply a long platform, with a low ceiling supported by blackened pillars, and stretching away as far as I could see, without any indication of a way out.

After walking some distance I came to an escalator, but there was no sign to indicate where it went, and the platform stretched on beyond it. I walked a little further. People were now hurrying past me in both directions, so the drift of the crowd gave no indication of the exit. I asked several people, but they seemed either not to know or not to understand me. Finally, I decided to turn back and see where the escalator went. It was only about half as wide as our London ones, and the length of a single-story staircase. It brought me out on to a much better looking floor. This was more what I had expected of a New York station: a lofty and spacious hall, with ticket offices, baggage offices, waiting-rooms and so on, around the walls. But the whole place had a strangely cold appearance, like a cathedral without a religion.

Crowds of people were diving about in all directions, and what with my suitcase and haversack and two coats (which were constantly slipping off my shoulder and requiring to be as constantly hitched up) and my naturally slow manner of walking, and the fact that I could now see several exits in several directions and wambled uncertainly between them all, I got involved in several collisions with people who obviously knew what they wanted and were determined to get to it as quickly as possible.

Then I saw the red cap of a disengaged negro porter, and at the same instant he saw me. We went to the baggage office to get my other suitcase. The man behind the counter said it wasn't there. I insisted that it must be there, but he handed me back my baggage ticket ("check" as Americans call it) and turned to the next customer. It was my important suitcase, containing my books and lecture notes. (I discovered these notes were not of the least importance later, but I wasn't to know that then.) The thought that they might be lost was appalling. But there seemed nothing to be done with the baggage man; he was too busy with other customers.

I decided to find a hotel and breakfast, and come back to argue about the bag later. Experience has taught me that in most personal crises from losing one's baggage to being crossed in love, it's better to eat, if possible

before taking action. An empty belly is a narking counsellor, taking a sour and selfish view of the universe—one moment despairing and afraid, and the next determined not to be put upon and snarling for its rights—whereas a full belly takes a nobler, wider view, balancing the personal mishap against the agelong martyrdom of Man, and seeing that mishap for what it is: merely another more or less amusing experience. Which probably explains why well fed professors of philosophy nearly always preach a gospel of tolerance.

The porter put me into a cab, and I ordered the driver to a hotel on Lexington Avenue that had been recommended to me by an American friend in London as cheap and central. The cab was a long, low and powerful De Soto, painted yellow, with red mudguards and red leather upholstery. The roof above the passenger was transparent, being made apparently of similar material to that used for airplane windows. It advertised itself on the bonnet of the engine as a "sky-view" taxi.

The driver jerked in his clutch and jammed down his accelerator in one movement, and we shot off like a flash of lightning. At least, the cab did. I shot backwards on the slippery leather seat, fetched up against the back cushion and then came along with the cab. The brakes were equally powerful. We rushed right up to a red light, then stopped as if we'd hit a brick wall. Or rather, the cab did. I stopped a fraction of a second later. After that, I held on, bracing my feet against a cross bar on the floor.

I thought at first the driver was annoyed about something, but when I got into conversation with him he was very friendly, and subsequent experience taught me that this was simply the normal manner of driving in New York. It is very spectacular, and very thrilling for the passenger, but if speedy transit is the object, I don't think anything is gained by it—not in traffic-congested city streets, with light signals at nearly every crossing. What counts there is intelligent driving, not powerful engines. The man who gets to his destination in the shortest time is the one who succeeds in maintaining a constant progress. And in spite of the much greater power of the New York taxi engine, I'd back the average London taxidriver, doddling along at a comfortable speed, gently fiddling his way through the traffic, taking advantage of every opening, and easing up wherever necessary so as to pass through as many traffic lights as possible on green—I'd back him, with all his apparent British slowness, to get across a traffic-tangled city just as quickly as his New York colleague, with far greater economy of petrol and far less wear and tear on tyres and brakes and nerves. Not to mention horns.

Most American drivers appear to be firm believers in the mystic power of the horn, especially at night. If your bedroom happens to be anywhere near a road junction it is impossible to get to sleep until well on into the early hours of the morning. The motor manufacturers seem to have pandered to this superstition, vying with each other to provide the horn with the most powerful and strident shriek.

As I say, my driver was very friendly, particularly when I told him I was a London cabman. But apparently he could speak very little English; and as I, unfortunately, can't speak any other language, we had great difficulty in understanding each other. It was a disappointment. I must have appeared stupid to the point of rudeness. He was trying to tell me so much about New York, and I could barely make out a word of it.

At the hotel I asked the price of the cheapest room. The reception clerk said single rooms ran from \$3.50 a night (about sixteen shillings) upwards. I asked what differences there were between the cheaper and the more expensive rooms. He said there was no difference in the rooms; it was just a matter of height. I said height didn't matter to me; I'd take the cheapest. He offered me one on the eleventh floor. It sounded like an attic, but I like being high up, and I followed the bell boy into the lift thinking of rooftops and views.

Of course, I'd got it all wrong. My room was nearer the cellar than the attic. The eleventh floor sounds high, but when there's a building running up to twenty floors or so on the opposite side of a narrow street, it makes your eleventh floor room so dark that you have to keep the electric light on all day. If I'd wanted light and air I should have had to go much higher, to the twentieth floor at least, possibly to the thirtieth, and paid a correspondingly higher price.

The room itself was comfortably furnished; with its own bath and water closet. This I found was usual in American hotels everywhere. Furnishings varied a little from place to place, but most of the rooms I stayed in had a bathtub and shower, and not only hot and cold water, but also a third tap for icewater. Several, too, had a "micrometer" tap for delicately adjusting the temperature of the shower, but this wasn't always as good as it looked. Many of them had a delayed action. Having turned on the shower, and felt it, and found it perhaps too hot, I'd move the pointer over notch by notch until the water was just right; then I'd step under it. A minute or two later it would suddenly go stone cold. Shocked and shivering, I'd reach up and move the tap to warmer, get it just right again, and begin to enjoy myself, when suddenly it would squirt out scalding hot. This last would send me leaping from the bath in terror. I can remember only one hotel where this micrometer tap worked as well in practice as in theory.

When I came down for breakfast, the waiter filled my glass with ice-water and offered me a menu with a bewildering choice of food. There were nine kinds of fruits, six kinds of fruit juices, eighteen different cereals, six egg dishes, five kinds of omelettes, sixteen meat and fish dishes, nineteen different kinds of bread, rolls and toast, six fruit "preserves," three jams, marmalade and honey. I wasn't in the mood for experimenting then, so I ordered orange juice, bacon and egg, toast, marmalade and tea. The waiter asked what kind of tea. There was Oolong, Ceylon, Orange Pekoe, Green, Mixed and English Breakfast. I took a chance on the English

Breakfast, but it turned out a weak and tepid disappointment, like most tea in the States.

After breakfast, I decided I'd better call at the office of the British Information Services, and get some money before going back to Penn Station to enquire about my missing bag.

It was a warm and sunny morning, though cool for New York in August, as I was to find out a few days later. The address I had was 30, Rockefeller Plaza. After getting directions from the hotel porter (it was quite close) I set off. From the flavour of the address I imagined something a bit Portland Place-ish—a shop, possibly, on the ground floor, since this was America, but a very genteel shop, and above that some rooms let out as offices. New York hadn't impinged on me yet.

And in that short walk, the buildings seemed very little different from those in the newer parts of London's West End. It occurs to me now that I didn't think of looking up; the height of the buildings therefore made no impression on me. Having spent most of my working life driving road vehicles, I suppose my interest is instinctively caught by the traffic when I walk along a street. When I think back on places I've visited, I find I usually have a much more vivid picture of the roadway in my mind, often of the actual road surface, than I have of what bordered it, whether fine buildings, fine woodland, or even a fine seascape. It occurs to me now, too, that the "sky-view" roof of the New York taxi is designed for the special purpose of looking up at the skyscrapers. But looking up at the sky is the last thing I should think of doing in a taxi; especially in New York.

Months later, when I was able to spend a whole day sightseeing, I found the right place from which to look at skyscrapers—the top (102nd floor) of the Empire State Building. From that lofty height you can look down upon most of them. I don't think there can be another view in the whole world like it. I can't describe it. The best that even the American publicity man can say is: "The eye sees but the brain reels." It is the city of to-morrow: fit for men like gods. I'd be willing to do a great deal for the privilege of living on that 102nd floor.

Meanwhile, creeping about at ground-level, I found the streets exciting enough. Walking up Forty-Ninth Street I found myself pausing on the brink of a broad, straight thoroughfare flanked by very expensive-looking shops: the roadway full of multicoloured taxis and smoothly gliding green buses, and the broad white sidewalks decorated with the most expensive looking women I'd ever seen. Such dresses, such figures, such faces, such hair-do's, and such hats!

Surely, I thought, this must be Fifth Avenue. I looked up at the name plate, and sure enough it was.

In that clear, clean atmosphere, lit by that bright morning sun, it made an extraordinarily pretty picture. And to me, accustomed to the sooty atmosphere of towns like London and Liverpool, it all seemed too good to be true—more like a technicoloured film than flesh and blood.

I stood on the corner for a while and tried to take it all in. But as I gazed I began to feel a disappointing hollowness inside me; a feeling that it didn't belong to me, nor I to it. Promising myself to come and take another look if I had the time, I crossed on the green light and went on my way.

The several people whom I asked for Rockefeller Plaza seemed not to have heard of it, but they all directed me toward what they called "Rockefeller Centre." ("Radio City," they said. "Radio City Music Hall.") It didn't sound the kind of place for a British government office. Then I saw a large figure 30 over the doorway of a solid-looking building in a small side-street, between, and running parallel with, Fifth and Sixth Avenues, and thought that was probably it. From street level, as I say, the height of a building didn't impress itself on me, and although I was conscious of a very impressive entrance as I went through the revolving doors—a feeling of great marble halls and the littleness of human beings, brought on I think as much by the dimness of the artificially lit interior as by the actual loftiness of the hall itself—I was a little awestruck when the man at the reception desk told me the B.I.S. office was on the fifty-first floor.

I asked how to get there. He looked at me as if he thought I was crazy. "Elevator," he said, jerking his head back toward the interior of the building.

He added something after the word elevator, but I didn't quite get it, and as there was a press of people at the counter, I had already given place to someone else. Anyway, it didn't seem important. The elevator, surely, should be easy to find.

And they were. There must have been scores of them. The difficulty was to find the right one. The centre of the hall was taken up with a series of blocks of elevators. Around the sides were shops. The whole was a city within a city, and this ground floor terminal of the elevator system was as busy and complicated as the terminal of a city transport system. The only difference was that these vehicles ran vertically instead of horizontally. Across the central block were short corridors, each corridor leading to a different set of elevators; each set with its own station master, or "elevator starter," and bound for a different destination. There were "expresses," and there were "locals." The one I wanted was a long distance express, its first stop the fortieth floor. But I didn't know that, and it took me some minutes and several mistakes to find out. When I did find it, after bumping into and out of several crowded elevators like a yokel at Piccadilly Circus, I saw I could have saved myself a lot of trouble by glancing upwards; for, at the corner of each block of elevators, just above eye level, there was a small illuminated sign, indicating the floors served from that block.

As soon as the elevator had filled (a matter of seconds) the starter signalled it off, the doors closed, the operator pulled over a lever, and

we were on our way. I was surprised to find there was little or no sensation of movement. We were completely shut in, so there was nothing to be seen outside our small, wood-panelled room, and the mechanism operated so smoothly, there was nothing I could feel. The only indications that we were not in an ordinary room were a faint but steady humming, like that of a dynamo, and the small illuminated figures above the sliding doors that changed with the floors we were passing. But as the first thirty-nine floors were covered by the comprehensive letter "X," nothing seemed to be happening until we got into the forties, and the figures flicked to forty-one, forty-two, forty-three . . .

On that particular trip our first stop was forty-four. As we stopped my stomach did feel just a suggestion of being in a lift. But stop is the wrong word for those Rockefeller Building elevators. We became aware of an infinitely gradual cessation; that was all. Then the doors slid back, and we saw we were at rest.

At fifty-one, I got out, and saw facing me, on the frosted glass of an office door, the most extraordinary conjunction of words I've ever seen: "PHILANTHROPIC FINANCE." I was to pass that door many times during the coming weeks, and the more I saw of it, the greater the joy it gave me. It probably had a simple and prosaic explanation. But I never inquired about it for fear of spoiling my original vision—of a huge fat man in a top hat, handing out great bags of silver dollars, while he patted each grateful customer on the back and urged him to come again.

At the office of the British Information Services, further down the corridor, I learned I should have very little time for sightseeing. My invitation from the Workers' Education Bureau would take me to a number of labour groups, but the B.I.S. was working out a schedule to take in a great deal more than that.

(The British Government was paying my fares, and giving me an allowance of ten dollars a day to cover hotel and other expenses. In return, if I earned any money in the States, I was to give the Treasury half of it. But as it turned out I was kept much too busy to be able to take advantage of the two worthwhile commercial offers that came my way, one from a private lecture agency and the other from Hollywood. Trade Union branches sometimes offered me money, but I refused it. It was better that way. I was disappointed at not being able to do the Hollywood job. It would have been with a director I admired. But as far as the speaking was concerned, I was only too pleased to be able to refuse money. Money's mucky stuff on a job like that—especially in wartime, and in the States.)

When I got back to Penn Station and asked after my suitcase, the baggage man repeated that it wasn't there. He let me come inside to see for myself. I found it in a far corner. But when I triumphantly pointed it out to him, he held fast to his original statement. From the baggage counter viewpoint, it still wasn't there. It was "in bond," and therefore

not available for handing over the counter. Having come from Canada, it had to be examined by the U.S. Customs. I asked him why he hadn't said so in the first place, and he said it wasn't his business, and we both got a little heated. Finally, he waved his hand toward a row of doors in the far wall and said: "See 'em in the office."

After making several inquiries of several hurrying persons, I finally found myself in a small office where a man in shirtsleeves was carrying on a long telephone conversation, apparently about something the railroad couldn't possibly do. When he'd finished, I asked him if he could direct me to a Customs Inspector.

"Call one," he said, rising and gathering some papers from his desk.

"How?" I asked.

"Telephone," he said. And went out.

Well, I'd got an office and a desk and a telephone at my disposal; it all seemed delightfully free and informal. The only difficulty was I didn't know whom or what to call; and there was no directory that I could see. But while I sat at the desk, hesitating (and, I suppose, looking helpless) a kind young woman came hurrying through—the first of a series of kind young women who befriended me all across the States. In American small towns, almost everyone will go to great trouble to help a stranger; but, in the big cities, the inexperienced traveller does better to seek out a kind young woman. And this not simply because of her natural kindness but, more importantly considering the end to be served, because of her complete efficiency. She knows what she's at. Many older people, though equally well-meaning, don't.

This one, seeing my hand hovering uncertainly over the telephone, stopped and asked if she could help; gave me the number I wanted and then, on second thoughts, put down her papers, and did the job for me. A Customs Inspector, she told me, was setting out for the station immediately, but as he'd got to come from the other end of town he'd probably be about half an hour.

It was about noon, but I had breakfasted late, so there was no point in rushing off to lunch. I prowled around the station and drank icewater. Much later, after I'd been sitting for some time in the little office—now occupied by two men, both vigorously engaged in telephone arguments with people who still seemed to be demanding the impossible—a small elderly coffee-coloured man in a blue uniform entered, and looked around enquiringly. It was obviously he. I introduced myself.

Grave and preoccupied behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, he noted my name in his long black book. Then he looked at his watch. "It's five minutes to two," he said. "I'll give you an appointment at two o'clock."

At his direction, I went back to the baggage room to open my bag in readiness for his coming. But the baggage man refused to allow me to touch it. I tried to explain but—

"Nobody touches that grip till it's released," he said; and began to

cry out in a loud voice, declaiming the powers of his office and his determination to exercise those powers while yet he held that office. This, I think, was not intended so much for me as for someone outside in the street, with a van, who occasionally interjected remarks which I couldn't quite catch but which goaded the baggage man into a fury. At length, he turned away from me and went to the door, the better to deal with this outside opposition.

At this moment the Customs Inspector arrived, peering around through his spectacles in search of me and an opened bag. He was reproachful when he discovered me without the bag, and waved aside my attempt to blame it on the baggage man. Together we walked over to the heap where it lay. As I bent over it, there was a roar from the returning baggage man, cut off in the middle as he saw the Customs Inspector.

I laid the bag out on the counter and the Inspector went through it. He was a little suspicious of my bottle of malted milk tablets (put in by my wife in case of shipwreck), but everything went well until he came to the books. There was one of my own there. The Inspector opened it near the middle and began to read. I hoped for a smile, for there was a good story near that spot. But the Inspector, his eyes carefully scanning it line by line, continued to look worried. I came closer and looked over his shoulder and saw that he was reading it upside down.

There must have been a good reason for his doing so, because he closely scanned several pages in the same manner. Then he closed it, glanced at the titles of the other books, and said he must take books and lecture notes away with him for censorship. I asked how long that would take. Only a few days, he said. Fearing it might be a few weeks, I explained I was on a lecture tour, and needed the notes immediately.

He thought for a moment; then told me to repack and, after signing several documents for the baggage man (quiet now, but obviously repressing emotion) ordered me to accompany him. He was small and agile; I am neither; the suitcase was a large one and the books made it heavy. As we hurried through the crowded station I had great difficulty in keeping up with him. It occurs to me now that I need not have bothered, but it didn't strike me then. I felt like a big bad boy being hurried along by a kindly though sorely tried old uncle. He was so obviously fussed and worried by me. And, I suppose, by New York standards, I was behaving rather like a half-wit—especially when, descending some stairs, we came to a narrow turnstile, and I tried to charge through with the suitcase held before me like a battering ram, fetching up with a bang against the solid iron barrier. He gave me such a pained and reproachful look.

"A nickel!" he said. "A nickel! Put a nickel in!"

If only he'd explained what we were at and where we were going I'd have called a cab. But he had apparently taken it for granted that I knew. It was only when my behaviour at the turnstile shocked him into a realiza-

tion of my ignorance that he explained we were entering a subway station, that the nickel was the fare, and that we were on our way to the censor's office at the other end of town.

Descending some more stairs, we came to a dingy platform, and about a minute later an equally dingy electric train came in. It was a surprise, after the cleanliness of the streets and that glimpse of Fifth Avenue. It might have been a smoke-grimed steam railway instead of an electric one. Our London tube is ultra-modern luxury by comparison. The train we entered was square-built, ugly and comfortless, with hard seats; but the sensation of speed was immense, though I'm inclined to think it was three parts noise and vibration.

Several stations along, we got out, ascended more stairs to street level, walked a short distance, and came to a building whose door was guarded by a man in blue uniform: tunic, breeches, and peaked cap, rather like a chauffeur's uniform except that there was a revolver prominently displayed in his belt. This New York cop (as I took him to be) was an unpleasant sight. I didn't like his truculent way of standing, nor the truculent way he wore his gun, nor the truculent way he looked at me. And I liked still less the loud and brutal "Hey!" with which he stopped me as I was about to follow the Customs man inside. I felt it was a citizen's duty to start a riot forthwith.

But the Customs man was not in the least put out. It seemed it was but the usual formality. He nodded to indicate I was entering with his permission, and together we ascended to an upper floor and entered a large room, around whose sides stretched long trestle tables. Here he left me for a while, and returned with another man in shirtsleeves, who was evidently a censor. I gathered from his slightly surprised look that this way of doing the business was unusual, but he went through my books and papers, and we all three of us discussed my reason for visiting the States and got very friendly over it, and finally I was able to pack my bag again and depart.

I discovered afterwards, discussing it with American friends, that the Customs Inspector had done me a great favour in so expediting matters. But if I had to do the trip again I should keep my bags in the train compartment with me while crossing the border from Canada. The Immigration and Customs men on the train do the job while you travel.

4

ON THE SOAPBOX



THE next morning I had a "press conference" (the first of my life) in the Rainbow Room, on the sixty-fifth floor of the Rockefeller Building. There were a dozen or so reporters from the New York papers, and some photographers. They were all very friendly, both at the time and in their papers afterwards. But I wasn't feeling at all good myself. I felt weak, nervous, apologetic, clumsy and ignorant—especially ignorant. The fact was that twelve months of busdriving, twelve months of being an automatic cog in a transport machine, had temporarily knocked the intellectual stuffing out of me.

I had first escaped from the tyranny of the industrial machine in my twenties, to become a comparatively free cabdriver. Years later, owing to a persistent writer's itch and some extraordinarily good luck (the banning of a play by the Lord Chamberlain) I began to make a little money out of writing. I continued to drive a cab when I felt like it, but I was no longer dependent on the gamble of the cabrank for a livelihood. I had become a member of the comfortable classes, living in a pleasant little village not too far from town, with a beautiful view from my window, a nice new bathroom, a motor-car to make me independent of railway timetables, and, above all, the feeling that I was a person.

Not a personage, mind you. My vanity, I think, is fairly moderate, as human vanity goes. But there's all the difference in the world between being treated as a person and being treated as lumpen proletariat.

The outbreak of war, and paper rationing, killed most of my journalism. But it greatly increased the radio work. Up to the end of the first blitz I was almost fully occupied with regular radio talks on the Home and the various English overseas services. Then my quarterly contracts were not renewed. I was, apparently, finished as a regular broadcaster. I've never discovered exactly why. All I know is how I felt about it.

On the rebound, I itched to do some "real" warwork. Something there could be no doubt about. I had still been driving a cab, of course, on and off; and I think the Ministry of Labour would have allowed me to continue with it (owing to my low medical grade). But the reduction of London's cab fleet to half its peacetime size, coupled with petrol rationing, had made it very difficult to get a full-time job on a cab. Besides, in my present mood, cabdriving seemed too much like waiting on the well-to-do.

So I decided to have a go at bus work. It was "real" work, all right, and it appealed to me as a neat transfer of my own particular skill.

Driving a bus I could carry more than ten times as many people as in a cab.

For the best wages and conditions I should have gone to the L.P.T.B., but there were a number of reasons against my doing that, and not least the knowledge that I should almost certainly fail to pass their severe medical test. So I went to one of the Tilling companies, who I knew would be satisfied with a Ministry of Transport certificate. All this, of course, had to be done through the Labour Exchange, but there was no difficulty about that. They seemed only too pleased to see someone who wanted to be a busdriver.

If I was looking for hard work, I had certainly found it. It wasn't the driving so much; it was the blasted bell—the constant stopping and starting; the constant struggle to keep time. However, with the assistance of the Essential Work Order, I managed to stick it. And, gruelling as bus-work is (for a grade three-er of forty at any rate) the busman does have the supreme satisfaction of seeing for himself, every minute of the day, how important he is to the life of the community. I feel very proud of having been a busman, even though I wasn't doing it through the blitzes.

But it put a damper on the questing mind. Bus and bed were about my limit. A short article or a radio talk was the weary labour of weeks.

And the time came when even the occasional talk had to stop. The immediate cause was a disagreement between myself and the bus company over my taking a day off to give a talk. The disagreement occurred at the last minute, when it was too late to cancel the talk without leaving a gap in the programme. So I did the talk. The bus company accordingly reported me to the Ministry of Labour as an absentee. I won my case, officially. But just as I was rejoicing over what I, at least, felt to be the scrupulous fairness of the Ministry of Labour, I received a letter from the B.B.C. informing me they would not require me again without my employers' permission. And there was nothing I could do about that except laugh and lump it, for while there could be no doubt about the importance of my busdriving, the importance of my broadcasting was entirely a matter of opinion; and I knew the bus company's opinion.

You couldn't, I suppose, blame anyone for it. The company would have had to be extraordinarily enlightened to have allowed me to do radio talks in duty periods, and I should have had to be an extraordinary genius to have justified their allowing it. And there was no reason, in wartime, why a busdriver should expect more freedom than a soldier. But of course I didn't feel like that about it then. I thought how the cards were always stacked against the manual worker. I thought, too, of the many people I knew who were doing far more important war jobs than I was (if you judged by the salaries they were paid and the deference accorded them) who yet could be spared to do a broadcast at any time, and on any subject—and, incidentally, to pocket the fee. (A low thought. But even a busdriver can use a fee.)

Following this final stoppage, I got so that I gradually felt no desire to write, or even to read. It was enough that the bus should run to time; what energy was left over from that was fully occupied with our little local garage troubles. At the end of a twelvemonth, I had lost touch with everything outside the daily round.

And so, when the invitation to America came, my first thought was: why pick on me? What did *I* know that I should go abroad lecturing? (It was, I think, the first thought in the minds of some of my mates, too, when they heard about it.) But I wasn't going to be such a fool as to refuse the invitation; and when, at last, I got my release, I spent the short time before my departure hurriedly reading up my country and making notes.

I had, of course, got the whole thing wrong. But the reading wasn't wasted. It made good background material.

Another thing that worried me was the thought of speaking in halls—indoors as distinct from outdoors. This "lecturing" label suggested something very formal, all neatly tied up like an academic thesis. I had never done that kind of thing. My small amount of public speaking had been done at the street corner, on the soapbox.

(A radio talk, of course, is not a public speech. It's a word in the ear of a friend; and usually a scripted word. It is, or should be, as carefully contrived as a poem.)

I'm good on the soapbox. But I've never discovered why—that is, I've never been able to reduce it to a coldly considered technique on the "that'll fetch 'em" principle. All I know is I can begin talking in almost any place where people are passing and I'll attract and hold an ever-growing crowd.

It's easy enough to attract attention. A few phoney hecklers, a queer costume, or a series of rude remarks shouted at the top of your voice, will soon make people stop and look. But it won't hold them. It's like the sensational newspaper headline without any justification in the news. If there's nothing good to follow, your audience soon begins to feel cheated and drifts away.

Personally, though I glory in a good street-corner meeting, I haven't the moral courage to mount the stump unless I feel I've got something extremely important to say—something so important that in comparison I, and my little personal timidities, don't count. If I don't feel like that, no amount of Dutch courage will nerve me to face the ordeal. And when I do, I can't be bothered with tricks. I simply get up and get on with it. If there are genuine hecklers, so much the better. Their opposition will be flint to my steel. The essence of street-corner speaking is the urge. So long as you have the matter in you, the manner can, and I think should, be left to the chances of the moment. The more you have planned the manner beforehand, the more you are likely to be put out and put off by chance interruptions. When you have nothing prepared, except for the meat of the matter inside you, the interruptions themselves give you

the scaffolding on which to raise your living structure. Spontaneity is everything.

It is fashionable nowadays to sneer at the street-corner speaker—the “Hyde Park Orator.” There are all sorts and conditions of them, of course, just as there are of other speakers. But you can’t be a dud at the street-corner, and get away with it—as you can in the pulpit or the lecture hall. If you haven’t got the gift you won’t hold the people. And it’s worth remembering that some of the world’s wisest men have held forth at the street corner—from Socrates to William Morris. Even Jesus Christ was the Hyde Park Orator of his day.

Bearing all this in mind, no doubt, the street-corner speaker is apt to look down on the indoor man as an altogether inferior practitioner—a man who needs to have his audience safely gathered in before venturing to address them, a man who relies on the fact that if they are normally polite people they won’t have the nerve to get up and walk out, let alone give him the raspberry.

And my own feeling, now, was that since I was about to take this unfair advantage of my audience, they had the right to expect something extra-special from me, something much better than rugged street-corner stuff.

I did my best to prepare for it by careful planning, but as I had no idea what Americans would be most interested in, and the whole of Britain appeared to be my subject, I found it difficult to arrange my thoughts in an attractive, ordered sequence. The subject was altogether too big. I couldn’t strike a line through the heart of it that would explain the whole. All I could do, it seemed, was to nibble round the crust.

This seems a good place to record the fact that, despite a general belief to the contrary, both in this country and America, neither the Ministry of Information, in England, nor the British Information Services, in the States, offered me any “guidance” either about what I should, or should not, say. I was simply taken across the Atlantic and turned loose in America to say what I pleased.

Even when I asked for guidance, none was given me. Not that I wanted guidance about what to say. I intended to say what I thought. But I did feel I needed some guidance on what Americans most wanted to hear about. No one seemed to know; not even Americans themselves. That is to say, not chairmen, nor the arrangers of meetings. I had to find out by experience. And that took a little time. Several carefully planned speeches, dealing with Britain in general, were politely received, but I knew instinctively that I hadn’t made more than superficial contact with my audience. They applauded and all that; but the deep, almost subconscious, feeling of complete fusion of myself with them, the feeling I used to get at the street corner, was missing.

I discovered the reason at my first big meeting in the Middle West; a State-wide gathering of business men; manufacturers working for the War Production Board. A few days previously I had lunched with the

State W.P.B. chiefs and they had impressed on me the importance of this meeting. They wanted me to give what they called a pep talk, to whip up the enthusiasm of the manufacturers for war production. I felt uneasy about it. I haven't even a smell of pep in me, being completely lacking in the commercial virtues. I am unable to say the word without embarrassment, and the sound of it in another's mouth makes me want to creep away.

Besides, the dozen or so men I met at this luncheon, highly efficient executives and all radiating pep, were taking a course in public speaking; and, regarding me as an expert, they plied me with questions about technique. How should one stand, for instance? Feet together? Or one foot slightly before the other? And if so, which foot? And what about the hands? Should they be kept still or should one make gestures? And if they were kept still, where should they be put?

I thought it over, but I found I could remember neither how I stood nor what I did with my hands. So I stood up to find out. I found my feet seemed most comfortable when planted fairly wide apart, and that my thumbs moved automatically toward my braces (I don't wear a waistcoat) with the fingers closing over the buckles. This puzzled them. Apparently there was no mention of this stance in their course. I suggested that was probably because braces are so seldom worn in America. But I warned them to stick closely to what their teacher said, for he was sure to be a far safer guide than I was.

Although I was tickled, I admired the painstaking way they were going about it. Here in England, we usually think of Americans as the reverse of painstaking. We think of them as very fast workers (which of course they are), and very fast work is associated in the English mind with scamped work. And we therefore think of Americans as slapdash.

I found that was usually a mistake. The attitude of these W.P.B. men was typically American. Here they were, big business executives, highly successful at their chosen professions, who, you would have thought, had every right to chuck out their chests and spout, with the assurance that lesser men would listen. But no. Since it was part of their new wartime duties to address meetings, then they would tackle the job as painstakingly as they would have tackled a new manufacturing process; learning all there was to be learned about it before putting it into operation. So there they were seriously taking lessons from a teacher like so many schoolboys; learning how to stand, what to do with their hands, exactly how to elocute on this or that occasion, and, for all I know, the appropriate expression to wear on their faces while they did it.

The average Englishman of the same commercial attainments would feel at least a little foolish in similar case; and if he did take lessons, would take them secretly. But these Americans had no such embarrassments. And they took it for granted that I, too, had made an extensive study of the art, and that I had become a past master of it—even perhaps taken

a university degree in it—or how should I be making this important tour?

Finally, I had to explain that I knew nothing about the technique of public speaking, nor did I know how to produce pep talks.

This rather upset the head man. He was accustomed to command; and having ordered a pep talk, naturally expected to have it served up to him, all present and correct, without further ado. However, the slight awkwardness that followed was smoothed over on my promising to do the best I could.

After lunch, he took me around the various W.P.B. offices and introduced me to all the subsidiary chiefs. To prove how good they were, he murmured in my ear, immediately before the introduction, the high salary each one got. The higher the salary he had to pay a man, the greater seemed his pride in him. I gathered that the more expensive his subordinates, the more honourable he felt his own position to be as their commander.

This again I felt was peculiarly American. But we in England have no cause for our customary sneer at this dollar valuation. Nor was my host thinking in terms of dollars as such. When he told me a man's salary, he was saying to me in effect: "Now here is a great, good and clever man—a man so great, so good, so clever, that the community is glad to offer him all these dollars for his services."

I don't say it is a morally sound valuation in a civilized society, but I do hold that it is a reasonable valuation in our present society, and far more honest and useful than the kind of information I should probably have been given in a similar case in England, where each man's salary would have been a close secret but his accidental kinship to a Somebody a titbit to be whispered with holy reverence.

The lunch was on a Monday. The night of the pep talk was Friday. But the intervening days were too crowded to give me time to attempt to prepare any pep. Which was just as well; for if I'd had the time I should only have worried, without being able to do anything useful. Friday found me busy all day, and with a short radio talk, booked, by some accident, to begin at the same time as I was due to arrive at the dinner. However, knowing by this time how unpunctual these evening affairs often are in the States, I wasn't unduly worried about that. I arrived for the dinner twenty-five minutes late, and even so was actually an hour and a quarter early. This was exceptional. Something had gone wrong with the catering arrangements.

In the meantime, sitting around waiting after a busy day and the final hectic rush from the radio station, I felt less and less like a pep talker with every passing minute. Although there was no food, there was plenty to drink, but after two whiskies I decided to leave the darling stuff alone until after the meeting. It was altogether too seductive, especially in my then state of mind. When I've got work to do I like to be cold sober.

Luckily, the head man was of the same mind as myself, so I was able to refuse further drinks without giving offence. This wasn't always possible;

though when it came to a choice between getting fuddled before a speech and giving offence to persons who were pressing me to drink, I consistently refused the drink—and if they chose to take offence they could. The urge to prove myself as good or a better man than my neighbour by drinking as much or more than he can is one that has never moved me. And any code of manners that makes it obligatory is, to my mind, uncivilized. Besides, alcohol is primarily a comforter, a softener of life's sharp edges, a soother of self-criticism, a warm blanket round the wind-chafed soul. And to deliberately harden oneself to it by heavy drinking, and in so doing destroy its delicate effect, is a brutish misuse of Man's greatest discovery.

However, there was no misuse on this occasion. There was a large crowd, and they were all drinking; but their work was done for the day, and they had every right to get a little tiddly if they wanted to; though the fact that so many of them did so was mainly due I think to the extraordinary delay in serving the meal.

Now it is fatal for the good mixer to remain cold sober while everyone else is getting a little tiddly, particularly if he is doing it, as I was, solely from a sense of duty. You begin by struggling against temptation, and having succeeded, you begin to envy the tiddly delights of the others. Then, as you watch them grow warmer, you feel yourself growing correspondingly colder, and begin to feel sorry for yourself—all alone, out in the cold, cut off from the fun and games by the wall of your own sobriety. At this point, all is not yet lost. If you cast caution aside, hurry over to the bar, and do your best to catch up, there is fair hope of salvation. But if you don't; if you do as I did, continue to resist the tempter; you fall into the last and worst stage of sobriety. You become self-righteous. You sit silently, with ice-bound bowels, coldly observing the merry throng around you, and feeling proud you are not as they.

By the time I had reached this stage, we had taken our seats at the tables, each of which appeared to be occupied by a group from a different town or county within the State. Each group, apparently, had its own local patriotic song. And since we had then entered the sing-song phase, each table was now singing its song, and being urged by its own leader (who was standing up and vigorously conducting) to outsing or shout every other group in the room. When several groups began to use their knives and forks to supplement their voices, the head man, sitting next to me at the speaker's table, began to look worried.

"If that food doesn't arrive soon," he said, "they'll be getting out of hand."

For my part, looking upon it as a speaker, I felt rather pleased. Here was a crowd that was rapidly getting rid of all its polite inhibitions, a crowd as near to a Saturday night street-corner crowd as one could wish for.

But as a man in the last stage of sobriety, I found myself contrasting the scene before me with the scene I had lately left. Home seemed a long

way off, and Britain a tiny island—a tiny blacked-out island as I saw it then, full of enduring stoics. For the first time in my life I glowed with an uncritical admiration of my country and my countrymen. These people here, I told myself, hadn't the faintest idea what war meant. I would tell them exactly how it felt; how it felt to be bombed night after night, how it felt to watch the sad procession of the bombed-out making their way toward the rest centre in the early dawn with a few salvaged belongings in a sack on their backs or piled in the baby's pram; how it felt to drive a loaded bus in the blackout, trying to get the day workers home and the night workers to work on time, when you could see only a few feet in front of you. How it felt to go round to the pub after a day's work, all ready to comfort aching limbs and soothe nagging nerves with a pint of whatever they had, and then find they'd got nothing—sold out. And yet again, how it felt to be working in a community in which every man and woman were putting all they'd got into one huge co-operative effort. Sitting there, I began to bubble, boil and steam with good stuff.

And when the food came in—the heaped up plates, the several courses, the quantity, quality and variety of it, such variety as only America can give—and I contrasted it with English rations, all I had to do then was to wait for the head man to uncork me.

First, however, I made a good meal. This was unusual. As a rule I am unable to eat immediately before a speech. My stomach is jellified and trembling, and curdles at the sight of food. But at these affairs you have to make at least a pretence of eating until the waiter relieves you of your plate. And American waiters are not so quick on the uptake as they might be about things like that. Discreet nods and even less discreet nudges convey nothing to them. The only sure method of getting rid of your uneaten food is to grab a passing waiter by the arm and say: "Hi! Take it away!" The waiter doesn't throw the food in your face. There's no insult in it. It's simply the American method of making your meaning clear. But I was never able to bring myself to it until I had lost all patience, and with it my English ideas of good manners.

During the meal, the boys continued with their larks; the fun and games becoming more noisy and hilarious instead of less so—as the head man had hoped. He was by now seriously put out about it, and though I assured him they were just as I wanted them, ripe for the gospel, I could see he felt they had completely let him down, and that his great meeting with all its high and noble aims was about to crumble in the dust.

But the worst was yet to come. When he rose to read his introductory speech—a grave and precise document of several typewritten pages—they actually dared to interrupt him. They laughed, jeered, wise-cracked. This took him completely aback for a minute or two. He just couldn't believe it. But he was too determined and dignified a man to play ball with them by dropping his solemn typescript and returning pleasantry for pleasantry. Instead, he took a firmer stance and firmer grip on his

papers, and continued reading in a loud and steady voice to the end. Then he handed over to me, with an apologetic look that said he had done his best but that he feared it was hopeless.

I opened on the Tommy Trinder tack: "You lucky people"—a tack which seemed to me peculiarly suited to the prevailing wind. It caught and held their attention, anyway. And that once accomplished, the transition to the contrast of wartime Britain was simple and easy. I was eager to make them *feel* it; feel the sensation of an air-raid, feel being underneath the arches at Shadwell, feel coming back along the street at dawn to find a wrecked home; feel what it was to work under the Essential Work Order, to live in the constant atmosphere of the front line; above all to make them feel the comradeship that we felt.

I don't remember what I said. And that because it wasn't I who was saying it. Somehow, with the thought of all my old mates in mind, made so vivid by the memories I was telling them, I faded out of the picture. It seemed I was simply standing there opening and shutting my mouth, and a much mightier power was supplying the words. My brain, shrunk to the size of a pinpoint to allow the greatest possible space for whatever it was that had taken charge of me, listened in amazement—aware, not so much of what was being said, as of the strength, vivacity, emotion, power and what you will, of the saying of it. It was one of the finest speeches I have ever heard, and it's a great pity I can't remember a word of it. There was neither a radio hook-up nor a shorthand reporter, so I shall never know what I said. But when I sat down, the audience rose up and gave me all they'd got. The head man was extraordinarily pleased. And so, sweating, limp and utterly exhausted, was I.

(Later, when I was trying to make up for the drinks I'd missed earlier in the evening, one of the W.P.B. executives I'd met at the original luncheon came up and pointed out that I hadn't once hooked my thumbs in my braces. I explained there had been no opportunity. The weather had turned very warm that day, and I had put on my new American Palm Beach suit—with belt.)

From that time on, I had no more doubts about what Americans wanted. They didn't want an academic lecture about life in Britain; they wanted to *feel* it. I don't think I was ever so eloquent again—or at least, never with quite that inspiration. But nearly every other speech I made was based on that central idea. Whatever aspect of British life I happened to be talking about, I concentrated on how it felt. Of course, this limited me mainly to talking about the few aspects I knew from personal experience. But by good luck, the things I knew best were nearly always what my audience most wanted to hear about.

On the whole, I got along better in the Middle West than I did in the East. In the Eastern States many people I met were cursed with a propaganda complex. It was, I felt, a judgment on them for being so clever as a nation at publicity. This applied particularly to the "boys in the back

room." It seemed they had become so accustomed to the idea of a man suppressing his personal opinions, and devoting himself body and soul to boosting a certain set of ideas for what money there was to be got out of it, that they had now become almost incapable of honest public speech; and, what was more to the point in my case, of believing that anyone else was capable of it either.

All this, of course, you must take as from whence it comes—from one accustomed to life in a group which earns its living by plain labour (where there is, therefore, little or nothing to be gained by deliberate deception) suddenly thrust up into intimate contact with a group which depends for its livelihood on its wits rather than on its labour, and which, in consequence, may have very different traditions. It is possible that what, to me, seems an abnormal corruption, spreading rapidly to kill man's one hope of a decent civilization, his faith in his fellowman, is something quite normal, which is sometimes a little more and sometimes a little less, and is, in short, nothing to be alarmed about.

Coming fresh from the bus garage, though, and plunging as I did, during my first few weeks in the States, straight into intimate contact with politicians and publicists, it was a shock.

It was a shock to discover, for instance, that it should be taken for granted, and with no sense of anything dirty or dishonourable, that I should have one story to tell from the platform, and quite another to tell the boys in the back room. And the fact that I hadn't was taken very much with a grain of salt. They didn't believe me, but they didn't blame me. It was only, they obviously felt, that I was being ultra-cautious where, among friends, birds of a feather, there was absolutely nothing to fear.

I remember having a drink with the boys in the back room after a big eastern meeting, when the talk turned, as it often does among friends and fellow-practitioners, on the amount of money[†] we were each making. It had previously irked me that though they had backed me wholeheartedly while on the platform, once we were off it, they obviously took it for granted that every man had his racket. Their racket happened to be selling X; mine happened to be selling Britain. As a fellow racketeer, they respected me; as a man, they liked me; but they'd all be damned to hell before they'd be such suckers as to swallow my platform talk.

Nothing of this, of course, was said in so many words, but the atmosphere was unmistakable. And so, now that we'd got to the stage of mentioning with justifiable pride the amount of good hard cash our respective rackets were bringing in, I thought I'd convince them I'd been telling them the plain truth, or at least the truth as I saw it, by showing that I'd got nothing to gain by telling anything else.

And so I mentioned casually that I got no fees at all; merely that ten dollars a day expense allowance.

This tiny mite, falling among four and five figure incomes with unlimited expense accounts, certainly created a sensation. But it wasn't at all the

kind of sensation I had expected. At first they were openly incredulous. And perhaps I should explain that ten dollars represented even less in that company than it would have represented to men of a similar group in England. Here, I suppose, it would have been equivalent to the expense account of a fairly well-placed commercial traveller. But in that American company it would have just about paid for a round of drinks. It was rather less than the day's pay of a New York bricklayer.

They couldn't see how a man travelling from place to place as I was could possibly exist on it. And of course I couldn't have done, if I'd lived as they lived. But by sleeping at moderately priced hotels, and eating at quick lunch counters (which I preferred, anyway) instead of at expensive restaurants; and often, as now, getting free meals and free drinks from my American hosts, I was able to rub along very comfortably. (As a matter of fact, over the whole nine months, I managed to save a little. Which was just as well, considering I'd got nothing to come back to except that "beginner's rate"—which I had no intention of accepting unless ordered to do so by my National Service Officer.)

No—the sensation I was causing was not at all the sensation I had intended. I didn't go into detail, nor did I mention my conversation with the official who discussed expenses with me before I left England, and who advised me, when arriving in a strange town, not to go to a hotel, but to ask a policeman where I could find a cheap bed for the night. (And very good advice, too, if only I hadn't been representing Britain in a country where poverty is definitely not associated with merit.)

As I write, of course, I'm being wise after the event. I had no idea of all this at the time I received that well-meant advice. But I appreciated it to the last drop when I saw the effect my disclosure was having on these men. I had, at least, convinced them; for they couldn't conceive of anyone making up such a story against himself. That was the point. It harmed my cause; it didn't help it. Therefore it was probably true.

One of them tactfully changed the subject to spare us all further embarrassment. They did their best to pretend it hadn't happened; ordered another round of drinks, and discussed the coming elections; even going so far as to ask my opinion. But it was all too obvious they'd be enormously relieved if I'd get up and go. And as soon as I decently could, I did; knowing that in the eyes of this little group at least the views of myself (and by inference those of my countrymen) were worth exactly what I was being paid to propagate them—nothing.

Fortunately, I learned this important lesson soon after my arrival. For the rest of my tour, I let the boys in the back room believe I was boosting Britain at a thousand dollars a boost if they wanted to. They probably wouldn't believe what I said anyway. But if they thought I was making big money out of it, they would at least take what I said into account.

Not that I went out of my way to impress this numerically small, though very powerful, group. I realized that nothing I could do about it,

consciously, could help at all. Whatever understanding was possible between them and us, would be possible only between them and their opposite numbers in this country. And may we all be preserved from that. It certainly won't do you and me any good.

At the other extreme is the sucker they cater for—the sucker ready to swallow the tallest propaganda story. I remember, months after this, going to a lunch counter in a small town in Pennsylvania one morning for a quick snack before catching my bus. It was just before the noon rush and I was the only customer. The man behind the counter had his back to me; he was cooking something on the hot plate against the wall. I asked for a ham sandwich. He turned his head, and took a good look at me. I had been long enough in the States by this time to know that look. It meant he had recognized my accent as British and he didn't like it. He turned back to his hot plate. I repeated my request.

"No ham," he said, without looking round. "Can't get no ham. Can't get nothing." And went on with his cooking; his tone, his back, his whole body giving me to understand that the sooner I got out of his shop, the better he'd like it.

In the ordinary way I should have thanked him and gone. But I had only a few minutes to catch that bus, and I wanted a sandwich first. Besides, I didn't feel like going. I suggested sarcastically that at last he was feeling the cruel pinch of war.

He rounded on me furiously. "War!" he shouted, "War! What's war got to do with it? It's these politicians at Washington. Sending all our food to Europe. Our butter! Sending our butter to England! Why, they've never eaten butter in their lives before! And shoes! Sending 'em our shoes! Do you know what they do with 'em? They hang 'em round their necks and use 'em to drink water out of."

Which so amused me that I sat down forthwith and asked for some of what he was cooking—delicious hamburger.

I did what I could about the butter, but naturally he felt that in trying to persuade him the English normally ate butter I was merely trying to pretend my country was as civilized as his. Failing to convince him, I asked where he got his information. He read it in the papers, he said. And then I had to rush off to catch my bus, so we didn't get to the shoes. (But notice the cleverness of the propaganda—not the use by Europeans of something the Americans could do with themselves, but the idiotic misuse. That's what rankles.)

But these are only the two extremes: the few above whose business it is to dish it out, and the few below who unsuspectingly lap it up. In between are the great majority—average commonsensical Americans who have become so bedevilled and bewildered through the years by torrents of conflicting and unscrupulous propaganda on everything from politics to sweating armpits that they instinctively distrust anyone who is obviously trying to persuade them to accept a new idea.

This is particularly the case in the Eastern States; probably because they are more exposed to European propaganda—or they feel they are more exposed to it.

Even people who invite you to speak, sometimes have their misgivings at the last moment. I remember a man who invited me to come and talk to the workers in his factory, in a small town in Massachusetts (a man who was English-born, incidentally). He picked me up at the town where I had been speaking the previous evening and drove me over in his car. For most of the way we talked about England. And then, as we neared the outskirts of his town, he cleared his throat and asked, a little diffidently: "Is there any propaganda in your speech?"

I asked him what he meant by propaganda.

"Oh," he said. "You know. Propaganda."

There was an uncomfortable silence, while I swallowed retorts that wouldn't have helped, and I think he wished he hadn't mentioned it. Then as I saw he had no intention of defining his meaning further, I said that if by propaganda he meant lies, I should not, knowingly, put any lies in. But if he meant trying my hardest to persuade other people to believe what I believed, why then my speech would be crammed full of propaganda.

I felt it sounded priggish; but I meant it. And we left it at that.

And then there was the trade-union official. I had been invited to speak at a local Labour meeting. Two men had promised to meet me at my hotel and take me there. They didn't come. Finally, I decided I'd better go on my own. I had some difficulty in finding the hall, and arrived late. However, everything went fairly well, and at the end of the meeting, one of the officials offered to drive me back to the hotel. On the way, he apologized for the slip in the arrangements, blaming the two men who had promised to meet me.

"Hell!" he said, "I know it's only British propaganda. But we've all got our jobs to do. They oughtn't to have treated you that way."

This, as I say, mainly in the East. From Chicago on through the Middle West to the Pacific Coast, people were much less suspicious; or if not less suspicious, less fearful and more self-reliant—listening to what you had to say as they'd listen to any other neighbour, and prepared to rely on their own judgment as to whether you were telling the truth or not.

MY AMERICAN HOME



My first big Labour meeting was at the little town of Beatrice, in Nebraska, half-way across the continent. I left New York at midnight on a Saturday, and by the time I'd got up and breakfasted on Sunday, we were well on toward the Middle West—running through a great, wide, flat expanse, with town after town strung along the railroad like beads on a string, and all looking, to the passing traveller, as much alike as beads; small, big, middling, and unmistakably American. There was a big, broad burliness about everything, an openness, a frankness, like the handclasp of a friendly giant. I could have cheered with enthusiasm at the feel of it. But when I try to go outside my own sensations and to describe in detail what I saw, memory presents only a blur of fields, factories, freight yards, bridges, railroad depots and advertisements; a blur which, as time went on, and one's eyes became accustomed to it, was simply the Great American Background—background to the far more intimate life within the rushing train.

I got to know that side of American life better than any other. The American train became my American home.

Most of my travelling was done first class. This was not so much from choice (though, of course, I prefer the best when I can afford it) as from necessity. I had to do a great deal of night travelling, and on most trains there is no sleeping accommodation except in what we would call the first class. The American train is usually divided into "day coaches" and "Pullman cars," the former approximating to our third class and the latter to our first.

The seats in the Pullman are built in pairs, facing each other, with an aisle down the centre. At night, the Negro porter folds down each pair to make one berth, and lets down a wide shelf overhead to form the other. The lower berth is the more comfortable and is slightly more expensive. It is easier to get into and out of; and, being nearer the wheels and the centre of gravity, it doesn't roll so much when the train is taking the bumper sections of the track at speed.

Each berth has its own pair of thick curtains, held together by a zip fastener, and giving you complete privacy. Or, at least, no one can see you undressing; but the space enclosed is so small that most people bulge the curtain; and anyone with a comic taste in these things can amuse himself by standing in the central aisle of a Pullman car at bedtime, guessing from the various bulges the size, shape, sex, age and momentary

occupation of the person within—though the difficulty of telling whether the bulge is caused by the fore or after aspect of the bulger tends to make the guesswork erratic.

Attached to the inside of the heavy curtains are two coat hangers, and on the wall side is a midget hammock which can be used for socks, underclothes and all loose oddments except those that would be spoiled by crumpling or, like a collar stud, would slip through the string mesh. On some trains, too, each lower berth has its own metal "air-conditioner," either against the window or attached to the curtains. But this, though welcome on a hot night, is little more than a draught creator—especially for the man above, who has no control over it. There is also a small electric reading-lamp at either end of the berth, with its own switch.

Your berth is reserved when you buy your two tickets; one your "transportation," the other your "Pullman reservation." For most of my trips I was given tickets for lower berths. But American trains are nowadays almost as crowded as our own; and when changes in my schedule compelled me to buy tickets at short notice I usually had to take an upper. The upper berth is about shoulder height. It isn't too bad once you're in it, but as there are no footholds for climbing, it is rather difficult to get into—unless you ask the attendant to bring his set of carpet-covered steps, specially made for the job. But I don't like asking people to wait on me, and a shelf at mere shoulder height is a temptation to any man not absolutely a cripple. So usually I scrambled up—being more or less successful according to the speed of the train and the state of the track. When I wasn't successful, it was apt to scare the man in the bunk below. The roll of the train tends to throw your feet inwards as you struggle to get a kneehold on the ledge above. It seemed to me there must be a neat, easy and graceful method of getting up, if only I could work it out. But, being stoutly rather than gracefully built, I never did.

Once in, whether above or below, the next feat was to undress. This I found less difficult than other travellers had led me to believe. I have heard it described as like trying to undress in a coffin, but I found the cramped space an amusing challenge to my powers of precision, and got a certain amount of fun out of thinking out new and better ways of removing and neatly disposing of each garment without bulging the curtain and (in a lower berth) being bumped by passers-by in the aisle. Getting in and out of your trousers is the most difficult. You have to do it lying on your back. Once off, too, they need careful disposal if they aren't to be too badly crumpled in the morning. You put your shoes on the floor under the berth and the Negro porter cleans them during the night.

What puzzled me was how the American soldier manages—sharing, as he is compelled to do, his lower berth with another man. The two of them lie in opposite directions, one man's feet alongside the other man's head. This position, I was told, is adopted for "hygienic reasons," but neither end of my fellowman would seem particularly attractive on the

same small pillow within six inches of my nose all night. And what if he kicks?

For all that, the American soldier is treated like a prince compared with the soldier travelling on a British train. With the exception of having to share his lower berth, he gets the full amenities of the first-class accommodation, including the observation, club and dining cars. The only difference I noticed between the accommodation of private and officer was this berth-sharing.

At either end of the Pullman car is a washroom. Smoking is forbidden in the standard sleeping-car, and where there is no parlour, club or observation car (as the three types of sitting-out cars are called) the washroom becomes the smoking room, too. It is a square room, about as big as four average bathrooms. Two sides are lined with basins, each with hot and cold taps, and a tap that squirts upwards, for cleaning the teeth. There is, of course, icewater, too.

There are also several electric points for plugging in electric razors, but these, like the micrometer taps in hotel bathrooms, don't always work; thus providing mild amusement for the old-fashioned users of mere safeties. There is such pride on the face of the electric-razor owner when he takes it from his case, and then such bafflement and despair after he has plugged it in.

Above the basins is a rack containing towels. These are renewed as often as necessary. You use a clean towel every time you wash your hands—an extravagance I found difficult to get used to. The third side of the room is completely taken up by a broad, deep, leather seat, wide enough for three or four people. Above it is a large mirror, extending the full width of the wall, and on the floor in front of it one or two spittoons. In the fourth wall, opposite the leather seat, is the entrance to the w.c., or "toilet."

It was here in this tiny room that the male passengers washed, gossiped, smoked, played cards, and generally eased their minds and bodies. I found it all a bit embarrassing at first. So much of what I had to do there I had been in the habit of doing alone. The kind of thing I disliked most was being included in a discussion while I was in the act of cleaning my teeth. I'm not sure why, but I think I felt they should have treated me as if I'd been invisible until, by putting away my toothbrush, I'd left the lavatory and arrived in the smoking-room.

But it was in these washrooms that I spent some of the pleasantest hours of my American journeys. There seems to be a common idea in England, greatly encouraged by Americans, that in America it is much easier to get into conversation with a fellow-traveller than it is in this country. I did not find any great difference between the two countries in that respect. I find it fairly easy to start a conversation with a stranger in an English railway carriage, and I found it equally easy in America. But just as I am sometimes politely snubbed, or shyly put off, in England, so

I was in America. But never in the washroom. The washroom is a club, your use of it automatically makes you a member, and as a member you are the intimate friend of every other member. Since physical intimacy is unavoidable, mental intimacy seems to follow as a matter of course.

Next to the washroom as a social meeting place comes the dining-car. Two people eating on opposite sides of the same table almost inevitably fall into talk, and there is always an easy opening in the passing of the salt. And the dining-room, of course, has the added attraction of not being confined solely to your own sex. I made the acquaintance of several interesting women through my good luck in sitting opposite them in the dining-car.

On that trip, to Nebraska, I remember three people in particular. There was the woman who showed me how to spread butter on celery; the man who told me about the British busdriver he'd heard on the radio, and the man who said that if he hadn't been born an American he'd choose to be British, and when I asked why, said: "Because the British have such a fine sense of honour."

6

LABOUR CONVENTION



WE ran into Chicago on the Sunday evening, and I changed there for a job I had to do on the Monday: opening an inter-allied exhibition in Iowa. This took me away from any rapid rail connection with Beatrice (where I was due on the Tuesday evening) and the only way to reach there in time was to cut across country—to Des Moines by bus, on to Omaha by plane, and then to do the last hundred miles by car. It reminded me of the days when I was speaking at meetings of the London unemployed, and used to walk to save a twopenny bus fare.

This was to be my first air trip. I both looked forward to it and dreaded it.

I got to Des Moines in time to allow for lunch before going out to the airport. My chief memories of Des Moines are two. The first was a shop devoted entirely to orange juice: at five cents a glass, ten cents a pint, and seventy-five cents a gallon. To me, so newly out from orange-starved England, it was dreams come true. I went in and drank my fill. The second memory is of the man opposite me at lunch. He looked a normal American, of the businessman type. But when we got talking, he told me this war had been "sent from Above as a punishment."

To see him sitting there, calmly eating his meat and vegetables and talking in this strain, was an alarming experience. The fact that when he'd

finished eating, he got up, paid his bill, and walked out just like anyone else, made it seem worse. I'd have felt happier about it if he'd ended by hurling his plate through the window and dancing the can-can. It made me wonder how many other people around me were going about looking in all respects normal and yet living in his kind of universe.

The plane was late, so when I got to the airport and had been weighed, I had a lot more time than I needed in which to think about flying. I was a little hurt that the girl in the office should be so calm and matter of fact about it. Fortunately, I had plenty to keep me busy in my continually swelling file of unanswered letters.

After I'd been writing for nearly an hour, I heard the hum of the arriving plane. The wicket door of the waiting-room snapped shut, for no passengers were allowed outside while the plane was coming down (the pilot had quite enough to do, I suppose, without dodging jay-walkers), and then, a minute or so later, the other two passengers and myself were told to take our places. The plane looked smaller than I had expected. Inside, there were seats for about twenty people arranged as in a motor-coach. The pilot, or pilots, were in a separate cabin at the front, and a stewardess sat somewhere behind us. She told us to fasten our safety straps and to pull the thick curtains across our windows, then there was a sudden roar from the engines, and we began to move with a turning motion—into the wind, I suppose. Shut in as we were, with the view cut off, I was unable to tell the exact moment we were airborne. All I was conscious of was the great drumming roar and a sensation of being neither here nor there, with all space and time suspended—which may have been the physical sensation of being airborne or merely my shameful panic.

Then I saw the passengers in front of me pulling back their curtains, so I pulled mine back and gingerly looked out. I was looking over a glittering aluminium wing, with the torpedo shaped back of the port engine just below and before me. Beyond the wing was blue sky, and below it fields, roads and houses, looking like a small scale model.

I was a little disappointed. It had seemed much more exciting on the pictures. It had even made my stomach swoosh. This was quite tame by comparison. There was little sensation of hanging in space; it was more like being in a motorboat, floating on the surface of a clear pool, with the small scale model laid out on the mossy bottom. For the first time in my life I realized the fluid buoyancy of air; its substantiality. There seemed to be no more danger of our falling than there was of a ship's sinking. After a while, I settled back in my seat to look at the reading matter provided: mainly publicity for the airline.

My reading was interrupted by urgent calls for the stewardess up at the front. It seemed someone was about to be sick. I thought I'd better look. It was an opportunity to learn how to manage it politely. I had heard that paper cups were provided alongside each seat, but I couldn't see any.

The stewardess came hurrying past me up the gangway, and bent over

a man several seats ahead: an Air Corps officer. But whatever she did, she did so adroitly that all I could see was her bending over him and the back of his bowed head. And neither on her outward nor her inward journey, a few minutes later, did she appear to be carrying anything. The next time a call went up, I watched again, and again saw nothing. And as I had no need of her myself I never did find out how she managed it. It was as baffling as a conjuring trick—craftsmanship *in excelsis*.

Looking out of my window again, I saw a cloud ahead of us, suspended in the blue like a huge blob of shaving lather. As we came nearer, it began to extend and expand and to show rifts and stretches of blue between the rolling banks of white, until what had seemed one cloud was now a multitude of clouds, through which we slowly passed, sometimes in the blue rifts with the wing-tips brushing the cloud edges, sometimes just below them, and, better than all, just above. And as the later afternoon sun caught them, tinting their white rolls and whorls and heights and depths with rich colour, it was so glorious as to be beyond all earthly comparison.

When the stewardess told us to draw the curtains and I realized we'd got to come down and that I might never see such a sight again, I could have wept. The joy of flying is not that one can look down on the earth, but that for a few glorious moments one can forget it; can literally leave it behind and soar up to play in that clean new world between the clouds and the sun.

If I could afford it, I'd have a plane of my own and go up every day.

At the Omaha airport, two men from the Labour Convention were waiting for me. They hurried me out to a battered old flat-topped Ford sedan. The plane was an hour late, and I gathered from their conversation that they had not allowed for that, had appointments to keep back at the convention, and therefore proposed to "catch up on" that hour during our hundred-mile trip. I also gathered that the car was a borrowed one, and that neither of them knew what it was capable of; and that one was optimistic and the other not. The optimist got into the driver's seat, the pessimist got in at the back, beside me, and off we went, standing no nonsense from anybody; while I derived what amusement I could out of the thought that a few hours before I had been scared of a mere airplane trip.

Once through Omaha, we began to set it alight. It evidently wasn't such an old jalopie as it looked. The engine, at least, was first-rate. I wondered about the brakes. But three times in the first fifteen minutes we nearly met our end, and three times the brakes saved us. So they were obviously all right. There were only the wheels to wonder about then; and I wondered about them until the end of the journey. Before getting in, I had noticed that both back and front wheelcaps were missing; and I feel that's a bad sign with wheels; it shows the owner isn't in the habit of fussing over them.

The optimist, a big burly chap, jacketless, and with shirtsleeves rolled above his brawny forearms, looked back over his shoulder to warn the pessimist to keep an eye out behind for speed cops. Then, looking forward

again just in time, swerved violently to avoid a car that had somehow got lengthwise across our radiator. As we straightened out, the pessimist permitted himself a slight moan.

I, being there in a national capacity, couldn't permit myself even that. I wiped away the sweat, said how hot it was, and took off my jacket—partly in the hope that, jacket off and shirtsleeves rolled up, I might begin to feel as carefree as the optimist.

He looked round to see if I was comfortable; and laughed when he saw me getting my jacket off. He had beautiful teeth. "Cigar?" he suggested, letting go of the wheel to fumble on the seat beside him.

The pessimist yelled. Again we swerved, just in time.

"I got plenty cigars," said the pessimist, hurriedly bringing them out.

We all three lit up, and the driver and the man beside me began to discuss the merits of the various convention nominees for official positions, and their chances of election. Whenever the driver disagreed with the other man, which was often, he took both hands off the wheel to emphasize his points. Once, I so far forgot myself as to clutch the back of his seat; my only excuse being that it really did seem all up that time. I didn't see enough, or know enough about American driving regulations, to be sure who was in the wrong, but a car had suddenly appeared in front, a few feet away, coming straight at us, its driver staring horror-stricken. But we swerved, and again all was well.

"See that feller's face?" asked our driver, looking round to make sure I was appreciating the fun. "I'll bet," he went on—taking a hand off the wheel to wave around at all Nebraska—"I'll bet you'll remember this ride as long as you live."

I think he was right. I shall also remember him as a justified optimist and a miraculous driver, for we ran into Beatrice and stopped outside the convention hotel, still intact, having done our hundred miles in an hour and forty minutes.

The main street of Beatrice reminded me of the typical "cow-town" of the old silent films, except that there were no horses tied up outside the wooden-frame buildings but, instead, long lines of, mostly old-fashioned, autos, parked on both sides of the road with their noses toward the sidewalk. The hotel outside which we had stopped was one of the few brick buildings.

The Paddock, it was called. Its interior decoration was gorgeous. Even in this small town, my room had a private bathroom attached; but it was the wallpaper that impressed me. The bedroom was papered in scarlet bands running horizontally round the room, and about six inches wide; and between the bands, on a rich raspberry background, were giant orchids. The bathroom was done in horizontal bands of blue, green and yellow, each about two feet wide.

After I'd looked at my room, I had some dinner downstairs in the comparatively ordinary dining-room, with my two hosts. (The driver, by

the way, was a minor union official, and the other man a branch delegate from what we would call the Municipal Workers' Union. He was a dustman, I think.)

Then I was taken to the town auditorium to see a vaudeville show, put on as the town's welcome to the delegates. It wasn't bad, and it wasn't particularly good; mostly song and dance numbers; but the delegates laughed and shouted and clapped so much that I felt there must be a lot more in it than I was capable of appreciating. It had already started by the time we arrived, and my driver and the dustman were disappointed to think we had missed a few items—for it now appeared that this was their urgent appointment, and that all our whirlwind driving and hair's-breadth escapes had been endured solely in order that we might not miss a word of it. After that, I had no doubt it was terrific, and applauded as loudly as anyone.

When it was over, about a dozen of us adjourned to one of the delegate's rooms to have a drink. Sitting on the chairs, bed, and any other article of furniture that would bear a human body, we wetted our whistles and discussed who was likely to be elected to which position on the morrow. I took little part in all this, knowing nothing about it anyway, and being very well content to sit and listen. It was all very much the same sort of thing you'd hear in a similar assembly at home—including, of course, the true and secret history of how who got what at the last election.

Being the guest, I had been given one of the two chairs, and my drink was beside me on the dressing-table. I took a sip of it. It tasted like scented soap and firewater. There had, I felt, been a mistake. After a second sip I was sure of it.

My host, the driver, though, as in the car, still the life and soul of the party, was yet keeping a corner of his eye on me. "You don't like that," he said. And then, turning to the others: "What Britishers like is Scotch. Who's got a bottle of Scotch?"

I told him not to trouble, but he insisted, and since no one present seemed to have any Scotch he ordered the dustman off to certain delegates' rooms to find some.

"But suppose they're not there?" asked the dustman.

"You're looking for Scotch," explained my host. "They drink it. Find the bottle and bring it here."

I suggested that maybe I'd got hold of a soapy glass. He shook his head. "It's Bourbon and ginger ale. Britishers like Scotch. I know." He turned again to the still hesitating dustman. "Go on. They won't mind. I'll see 'em in the morning." And then, raising his voice, as if to a stupid child: "Britishers don't drink Bourbon!"

A few minutes later, when he was able to place a nearly full bottle of Scotch on the dressing-table beside me, his smile was that of one who, though universally acknowledged a miracle worker, was modest enough

to refrain from bragging about it. "*I know*," he said, waving away imminent torrents of gratitude, and then patting me on the back, "*I know*."

The next morning, a dark-haired, handsome young man called to ask if I would speak at the local High School that morning, before my convention speech. It would be a great treat for the youngsters, he said, as few of them had seen an Englishman.

I went. Before I'd been speaking five minutes I knew, as a speaker always knows, that they would laugh with me, fear with me, weep with me, rejoice with me, as I would. And I felt uncomfortably responsible. Any man who could take advantage of that audience to fill it with his own prejudices, I felt, deserved to be disembowelled.

The convention speech, like most of my labour convention speeches, was a rather formal affair. It was the annual convention of the Nebraska State Federation of Labour, and the delegates were, naturally, busy with their own organizational problems; but they gave me a polite hearing. Apart from showing oneself and, by bringing greetings, to remind the assembly that there is a British trade union movement all alive and kicking, there is not a lot to be accomplished by convention speeches. It is the by-products that are important: the social contacts with delegates and officials, and the incidental meetings around and about. I probably did more for future international understanding at the High School than I could have done by addressing a dozen conventions.

A proof of that was brought to me during the afternoon, when the same young man called again to tell me the youngsters had gone home so full of the Englishmen that now their parents wanted to see him. Would I speak at the town auditorium that evening? When I said I would, he was delighted, and rushed off to get the announcement into the local paper in time.

A few hours later, buying a copy in the hotel lobby, I saw they'd done me proud: a heavily ruled panel on the front page, announcing my presence in town for the convention, giving some details about me and adding, with delicious flattery, that, on being informed of the enormous local interest aroused, I had very kindly consented to appear at the auditorium that evening; the implication being that any citizen who missed this was missing the opportunity of a lifetime.

For all that, considering the meeting was arranged at such short notice, I was surprised to find the auditorium crowded, and my audience as rapt as the youngsters had been. After I had finished speaking they questioned me for over an hour; a neighbourly questioning, as though each was eager to get the feel of every little detail of the average Englishman's life and outlook.

Afterwards, the young man who had been doing all this arranging took me round to the local drugstore (cum soda fountain and ice cream parlour) and we sat drinking cokes and discussing international politics for another hour or more. He told me he had been a teacher at the High

School, but had lately left to become secretary of the town's Chamber of Commerce. Which seemed a pity to me, for he was a man of fine and noble quality; the ideal kind for a teacher. He was greatly admired by the youngsters. In that drugstore, which seemed to be their club, I noticed how the youths and girls greeted him as they passed our table. The expression in their eyes as he acknowledged their greeting said everything. He was also a local amateur athletic champion, which probably accounted for a great deal; and, as I say, he was extremely handsome. I envied him the look in the eyes of the girls—most of them around sweet seventeen, and several very beautiful. I hoped he would invite some of them to our table, but he was much too engrossed in our discussion, apparently, to think of it. He had obviously read a great deal about European politics and this was an opportunity to discuss it all with a European, first-hand. We soon found we were congenial in our political outlook (or, more exactly, our religious outlook; our conception of the purpose of Man) and parted firm friends. I went to bed that night feeling I'd had a thoroughly satisfactory day.

But a day at a Labour convention didn't always turn out like that. At another small town, in another State, where I attended a similar convention, I was received very differently. I arrived by train about ten in the morning and, failing to find a taxi, walked to the convention hotel which, fortunately, was only a few blocks away. When I asked for a room, the reception clerk told me there was none to be had. I left my bags with the porter and asked around among the group of union officials in the lobby for the person I should report to. Man after man showed a heavily polite interest in the fact that I had come from Europe to speak at the convention, but each was obviously only too glad to take the first excuse to introduce me to someone else and then fade away. Finally, I was introduced to a woman delegate who suggested I should try a room upstairs where the delegates registered.

I did so, and after a number of explanations to different people, finally met the man who was in charge of the speaking arrangements. He was by no means pleased to see me, and when I told him I had come at their invitation, he said: "We invited a lot of people, but we didn't expect them all to come."

His attitude was that of the harassed shopkeeper toward the hundred and first commercial traveller; and I suppose that was just about how things were. He gave me a convention button to stick in my lapel and said if I got to the hall after lunch, he'd see if he could work me in.

I went on the platform at three o'clock, between a war-bond salesman and a man from the Government price-fixing bureau, and the chairman resignedly introduced me as "a man who wants to talk about Britain." After I'd been talking for about ten minutes he passed me a note asking how much more time I wanted. So I drew to as graceful a close as I could and stepped down. Soon after, at about half-past three, the convention shut down for the day.

When I came out on to the street it was pouring with rain; and as it was impossible to get a train out until ten that night, I went back to the hotel to try again for a room, but I was unlucky. For a while, I hung about in the lobby and tried to get acquainted with some of the officials, but though all were polite each was obviously glad of the first excuse to break away. It was my first experience of this sort of thing, and rather a blow.

As the lobby got more and more crowded and I began to feel more and more alone and in the way, and as there was no place where I could sit and read, I decided I might as well take a look at the town. When I got out, it was still raining heavily, so I tried the town's two cinemas, but discovered neither opened until after seven in the evening. I took shelter in shop doorways for a while, until the rain eased down to a steady drizzle, and then decided that though there wasn't, apparently, much to see, I might as well keep my blood in circulation by keeping on the move.

I walked up and down the deserted streets, past block after block of grey unpainted wooden frame houses until, halfway along a completely empty street near the railroad tracks, I suddenly heard a woman's voice—almost in my ear it seemed: "Hey, honey! I know you, honey! Hey, honey! Stop!"

I stopped, bewildered for the moment. I could see no one. And then the voice said: "Come round to the side door, honey." Which explained everything.

I realized then that the voice was coming from the house against which I stood, but as the windows were covered with closely woven wire mesh, I could not see in, though the person or persons inside could, of course, see out. As I stood there, another voice, and then several women's voices, repeated the invitation to come round to the side door.

But I decided I had better keep on walking. It was a hard decision to have to make, for I couldn't help contrasting their warm welcome with my reception at the convention. But if, as it seemed to me, there was a strong anti-British feeling in the town, the news of my visiting the local brothel, even though solely in the interests of international understanding, would be too great a present to make to the opposition. So, regretfully, I hardened my heart and walked back toward the centre of the town.

Coming to a saloon, I thought I might as well go in and have a drink. I don't like solitary drinking, but anything was better than walking those dreary streets. And as it turned out, I wasn't solitary for long.

A slim young man, sitting on the next stool, leaned over and said: "I liked your speech." And went on to tell me he was a branch delegate from the Hod Carriers' Union. I said I was glad somebody liked it, because I had thought I wasn't going down at all well; and I told him what my reception had been among the officials.

"Sure!" he said. "They don't want a man like you butting in around here. They're too busy fixing local politics."

And he went on to tell me that the State Labour leaders were reactionary and isolationist, and that they had helped to defeat the last Democratic Governor by working up an agitation against him as a "Red."

He looked more the artistic than the hod-carrying kind; and on my asking him what it felt like to carry a loaded hod up a ladder, he said he didn't know, he'd never done it. He had merely been hired by the Hod Carriers to represent them at the convention.

He said he often earned a few dollars by doing jobs like that, and looked surprised when I said I had always thought it a strict rule of trade union procedure that a branch delegate had to be elected from among its members. According to him, "hiring" a delegate was a common practice in this part of the world.

I must have struck him as a very naïve and innocent Englishman, but he was by no means superior in his attitude toward me. He seemed to have taken a liking to me and to be telling me all this in the manner of a man who didn't want to see a likeable fellowman unnecessarily puzzled by unfamiliar conditions. The present Republican State Governor was speaking that evening in the City Hall, he said. If I cared to, we could go and hear him; and then I could see for myself what a double-crossing bunch these local politicians were. And he said it without heat, rather as one biologist might suggest to another that they should view the local vermin.

We called in at a lunch counter and had a snack on our way to the meeting, and while there, I told him of my experience down by the railroad tracks. Another man, apparently a local citizen, who was sitting on the stool on the other side of me, chipped in to say that it was the best whorehouse in the whole State, and the girls only charged two and half bucks. I said I didn't doubt they were lovely girls, and very cheap. But this failed to mollify him. He seemed to feel it was an insult that a Britisher should presume to pass them by. However, there was nothing more I could do about it, so we let the subject drop.

As we walked along the wet sidewalks toward the City Hall, I mentioned to my friend that, although I had been in several American cities by this time, I had never once noticed a girl obviously plying for hire on the street.

Still giving no sign of the surprise he must have felt at these revelations of my innocence, he patiently explained that if you allowed girls to ply their trade on the streets, you would be allowing them to get away with all the profits. Most American towns, he said, had long since been cleaned up by their local politicians, who thus ensured their own high moral standing with the local Churches and other religious bodies, and therefore the certainty of their votes, and also earned themselves a nice little profit on prostitution—since the girls, barred from the streets, were compelled to ply their trade in houses under the politicians' control. He told me this like a teacher giving a child its first lesson in simple arithmetic.

At the City Hall, the State Governor made an oratorical speech which

committed him to absolutely nothing. But it was a good speech. I wouldn't have thought it possible that a man could hold my attention for a whole forty-five minutes without saying anything. Yet he succeeded in doing so in spite of the fact that my friend was quietly whispering in my ear, in his invariably unemotional tone, almost word for word what the Governor was going to say next—this interspersed with comments on the personal history of some of the Labour leaders on the platform. He may have been right about them; but for the Governor himself I could feel nothing but admiration, if only for his magnificent performance. He was a fine figure of a man, and when he told us how much he admired "Organized Labour," I couldn't help feeling a warm, brotherly glow toward him.

At the end of the meeting, he made his crowning gesture. When my friend and I turned to go we found that the Governor had somehow managed to get off the platform and round to the door, which was at the other end of the hall, before anyone could leave. And there he stood, shaking hands with each one of us as we went out. It was no formal handshake either, but a warm, firm grip, with a few words of thanks for coming, as if each one of us had been a lifelong friend.

I took advantage of this close contact to give him a thorough going over, eyes, mouth and all the other little things that give a man away. But I could detect no falsity, and I came away full of liking for him; for I do love a virtuoso.

It was now nearly time for my train, and my friend came down to the depot to see me off. On the way, he told me he was thinking of "getting into the war." He proposed to try for a job as a merchant seaman as soon as he had collected sufficient money for the fare to the nearest port. He said he had already served in the army and the navy, in peacetime, but had been "let out" of both.

I asked him why.

"I couldn't get along with the officers," he said.

And as he obviously wasn't keen on going into details, we left it at that. I wished him good luck in the merchant service and we parted. I should have liked him to have come with me. He would have made an ideal travelling companion.

But to get back to Nebraska. The next day I went to Lincoln, the State capital, and there was privileged to watch a meeting of an Industrial Conciliation Board, consisting of a State Senator as chairman, and two assessors: the President of the Nebraska Federation of Labour, and the local attorney for the Union Pacific Railroad. The case was a curious one, brought by the Cement Workers' Union, charging a cement company with "unfair discrimination" in paying some of their workers more than the union rate.

It seemed topsy-turvy to me to hear the representative of the Cement Workers' Union demanding a reduction of wages, and the lawyer for the cement company arguing with equal insistence for the company's right to

pay more than the union rate. But the union's case was that the company paid certain men above the rate in order to undermine the workers' faith in their union as a bargaining agent, and that therefore it was an unethical practice and should be stopped. The company maintained that they did it out of sheer goodness of heart, and by way of rewarding exceptional merit; and claimed the right to continue to do so under a clause of their agreement with the union.

If there was such a clause, it seemed to me the union had no case; but so much turned on the point of whether these higher wages were being paid in good faith or with malicious intent, that possibly there was a case for the Board to consider. The Board, after hearing the arguments on both sides for some two hours, adjourned; and Roy Brewer, the President of the Nebraska Federation of Labour, told me that the decision would be promulgated later. Being one of the judges himself, he couldn't, of course discuss the case with me; so I never did find out the result.

That evening, Roy took me out of town to dinner at a place called "The Italian Village," where I had a delicious green salad, dressed with a simple blending of oil and vinegar—which to my mind beats all the varieties of highly coloured pastes that American restaurants usually plaster on their salads.

We rushed back from there to a big cinema where I was due to speak. Before I went on the stage I was interviewed in the lobby for the local radio station. After that I spoke from the stage before the big film came on. It was the première of a war film. Including everything, the performance lasted from eight in the evening until ten minutes to one the next morning. What Americans will endure in the way of pleasure almost passes belief. I went to bed at two, feeling completely sold out.

Roy telephoned me at eight, inviting me to breakfast at eight-thirty; and there we had to say good-bye, both of us sorry, for we had taken a great liking to each other during those few days, and we both felt that, from the political point of view alone, we could have very profitably spent another week together.

7

THE PRIDE OF OMAHA



My last port of call in Nebraska was Omaha, where I was due to speak at the weekly meeting of the Omaha Central Labour Assembly—what we would call the Trades Council—a body made up of representatives from all the trade union branches, or "locals," in the city. This was a first-rate meeting, as nearly all such meetings were; not so much from the

speech angle, though that was received enthusiastically enough, as from the brass-tack point of view—the questions and discussion that followed. These men, and sometimes women, represented almost every trade in the city. They were either actual workers in the industries they represented or, in the case of paid minor officials, were in daily contact with those workers. Unlike the majority of manual workers, they were not so battered and exhausted by toil as to have had their minds dulled into an indifference to the outside world. They were neither ploughmen plodding home their weary way nor lily-fingered intellectuals, but men and women who, by native ability and good luck, were able to combine the earthy experience of the ploughman with the questing mind of the philosopher.

These meetings with city Labour Assemblies (both A.F. of L. and C.I.O.) were the most fruitful, congenial and, for me, the most educative, of all my meetings.

By about eleven o'clock, questioned and cross-questioned into complete exhaustion, I was glad when some of the boys suggested it was time we had a drink. The meeting was adjourned and a dozen of us went off to what they informed me was the local working-class "joint": a small dance-hall, pub and café, with an orchestra of three, which greeted my entrance with "For he's a jolly good fellow."

I was very well content to leave the dancing and the jollification and any more talking that might be necessary to my companions. The evening tails off into a rosy memory of myself sitting at a marble-topped table, on the edge of the small crowded dance floor, with a long line of glasses before me, filled with a mixture of coca-cola and whisky—a line which somehow never seems to get less; for as fast as I feel I am catching up on it, it lengthens at the other end. Several drinks along, I remember noticing the whisky had changed from Scotch to Bourbon, but several drinks further along I decided that, after all, I liked Bourbon better, just as I liked all things American. Sweetest memory of that night, is the last supreme compliment my hosts paid me when, accompanying me back to my hotel in the early hours of the morning, they told me that after the war I ought to come back and settle in Nebraska, for in their opinion I'd make a first-rate citizen.

The next day, after breakfast (which for once I was able to take fairly late) one of the men I had met at the Labour Assembly telephoned to ask if I'd like to look round the local bus garage; and on my saying I would, came round to the hotel for me.

The garage housed a fleet of long-distance buses running between Omaha and Salt Lake City, and in some cases as far as California. They were about the size of our own single-deck thirty-two seaters, and powered by diesel engines.

What struck me most, as I sat in the driver's seat, was the absence of vibration when the engine was idling. These engines seemed to be a great improvement in this respect on our English bus engines, and the secret

of their smoothness, I think, lay in their being two-cycle (or two-stroke) engines as against our four-cycle. They were also housed at the rear of the bus instead of at the front, so that if there was any vibration to be felt, the driver would be the last person to be troubled by it. This was the first time I had seen a two-stroke diesel, and I was surprised not to have heard of at least an experimental one on an English bus—until the driver who was showing me round told me they had only come out in 1940, which of course explained it.

The drivers were paid on a mileage basis: four cents a mile, with a minimum of 115 dollars a month. But most of them, I was told, earned that amount in a fortnight—which, I calculated meant they did an average of about two hundred miles a day for a wage of ten to eleven pounds a week. This, in spite of the higher cost of living in the States, compares very favourably with the English busdriver's approximately equal mileage for about half that wage.

I spent the rest of the day looking around Omaha by myself, and while I felt a little lonely wandering around with no one to talk to, I was glad to have a breather. Without a knowledgeable guide, I was unable to discover anything of peculiar interest in the streets. Omaha struck me as being laid out much like any other American town of its size, with a strictly geometrical pattern of streets, plenty of imposing modern office buildings, and the usual multiple stores. For light relief, as in New York, there was the variety of original spelling on the advertisement signs and shop window cards. The one I liked best was a sign outside a cookshop, announcing: "HARKER'S HOLSUM HAMBURGERS."

Back at the hotel, I dined in solitary state. I was staying at the Hotel Fontenelle, which was reckoned to be one of the best, possibly *the* best, in the town. And the pride of the Hotel Fontenelle was its dining-room, called the Bombay Black Mirror Room. You walked up a flight of marble steps from the lounge to reach it, and when you got on the top step, the doors, of plate glass set in heavy white metal frames, opened automatically before you, on the light beam principle.

You then found yourself in a large room with an oval-shaped bar in the centre, inside which three or four busy bar-tenders were working at top speed, mixing drinks for the wealth and fashion of Omaha.

Passing through this, for it was no place in which to sit and drink alone, you came to the dining-room proper. This was a breath-taking contrast in red and black—the walls giving the effect of being all black mirror with dark red surrounds, except for a wide and deep serving hatch in one wall, which was so lighted, coloured and arranged, as to give the effect of the meals being served straight from out the star-spangled blue velvet of the night.

It was far too grand a place for me to eat in. But, once inside, I didn't care to turn round and walk out. So I sat down on a chair made of dull platinum-like metal, with a rich crimson leather seat, and awaited the

outcome. Soon, I saw a tall and handsome Negro, dressed in a sky-blue frock coat, with yellow cuffs and facings, and white trousers, approaching my table.

One of the minor drawbacks of being a British Worker is that, no matter how much money you may momentarily have in your pocket, long habit and hard experience lead you to view the approach of all such grandly dressed personages with the immediate expectation of being chucked out. But this personage, like so many Negro-Americans, succeeded so well in combining politeness with dignity that he not only immediately put me at my ease, but made me suddenly resent the fact that a fellowman should be so dolled up.

I ordered a Scotch and soda, followed by iced *consommé*, roast beef, sweet corn and new potatoes, and peaches and cream; and, on eating it, made the most amazing discovery of all. The food served in the Bombay Black Mirror Room was every bit as good as the furnishings. In most hotels and restaurants it's the other way about.

A few weeks later I visited Omaha again, this time to meet some of the business men, among them the members of the Tribe of Yessir. The leaders of the Tribe told me they had formed it during the Depression—their object being to insist on saying Yes when everyone else was saying No. I brought away one of their membership cards. It is a yellow card, about the size of a postcard, and on one side is an Indian, printed in colour, holding a rifle in one hand, and holding his other hand up as though blessing the applicant for membership. On the other side, is the pledge, which runs as follows:

TRIBE PLEDGE.

Do you promise to adopt a positive and affirmative state of mind in your regard for this fair realm of Omaha, and the State of Nebraska?

YES, SIR.

Do you agree to continue this mental attitude in your treatment of your fellowmen, in your business dealings, and in your remarks and discussions regarding this—your home town?

YES, SIR.

Do you further pledge yourself not only to admit, but positively insist, that Omaha is a real good town, full of good fellows, and that all the world is bright and sunny and getting brighter and sunnier constantly?

YES, SIR.

Do you finally take this solemn obligation to keep as a pledge and hold as a promise during the rest of your natural life in Omaha for ever and ever and from now on?

YES, SIR.

The war must have hit them an awful blow.

CHICAGO



FROM Omaha I returned to Chicago where, in a series of visits, I spent altogether about three weeks. Chicago is the heart of America; it is America, in a way that cities like New York and San Francisco are not. And when you're in Chicago you feel it's even more than that; you feel it's the volcanic heart of the world.

Bigness is the fundamental first impression. Everything in Chicago is big—the buildings, the boulevards, the railroads, the stockyards, the magnificent apartments of the rich and the sprawling slums of the poor. And perhaps the biggest thing of all in Chicago is the talk. Everything good in Chicago is bigger and better than anywhere else; everything bad is bigger and badder. What I like about Chicagoans is that, unlike the citizens of most other cities, they don't parade the good while trying to hide the bad, but proudly made a parade of both. They'll boast, in one and the same breath, about the architectural beauties of their Lake Shore Drive and about the millions of dollars made out of it by smart city politicians and contractors.

There is an atmosphere about Chicago that is spiritually intoxicating. It seems to be compounded of the supposedly tonic climate of the Middle West and the virility of the Chicagoans. Its effect on me was to make me feel, for once in my life, unreasonably proud of being alive, and even prouder to be walking the sidewalks of Chicago. I entered Chicago a diffident Englishman, hoping to be permitted to say a word or two about England. But a few days association with Chicagoans turned me into a burly Britisher, boldly bragging about Britain. (A form of address which suited Chicagoans a treat.)

But now I am back in England again I realize that my Chicago mood was due also to the difference between the British and American social atmospheres; a difference that, by the time I reached Chicago, was having its full effect on me.

A few months ago, I read an article on W. H. Davies in which the writer remarked on the fact that Davies, in his autobiographical work, presented himself as a confident, tough guy when a hobo in the States, and as a timid, diffident chap in England—the inference being that in these contrasting descriptions of himself he was not being sincere. But my own experience in the two countries convinces me that he was not only sincere in his description, but consistent in his conduct. It was exactly the same Davies all the time. The difference (though Davies himself may not have been conscious of it) lay in his reactions to the differing social atmospheres.

There is a little verse they teach English council school boys—or they did when I was a boy:

“The stately homes of England,
How beautiful they stand!
Amidst their tall ancestral trees,
O’er all the pleasant land.”

It’s the key phrase; it sets the tone of the social atmosphere in which the boy will grow up. It isn’t as forthrightly brutal as the key phrase of our great-grandfathers: “God bless the squire and his relations. And keep us in our proper stations.” It is less rigid and far more gentle; it has a caressing rather than a commanding tone, but its implication is the same.

In those stately homes live superior people; those superior people have superior sons; those superior sons go to superior schools and so become superior men. When the council school boy grows up, it will be his duty (and his privilege) to serve them.

The whole tenor of the council school boy’s education is to make him feel inferior to the boy from the public school, just as the tenor of the public school boy’s education is to make him feel superior. The one is taught to obey; the other to command.

This is not so much a class difference in the Marxist sense, as a caste difference; a difference that will continue throughout their lives, no matter what their abilities or subsequent fortunes. Each boy will bear his caste mark indelibly stamped upon him in his accent; and each has been trained to respond automatically to the different accent of the other.

However successful financially the council school boy may become, and however unsuccessful the public school boy, each will still belong to his original caste. The successful council school boy will still be made to feel socially inferior; while the unsuccessful public school boy will still feel entitled to look down on him. It will persist even into such groups as the socialist parties. You will find earnest ex-public school boy members of even the Communist Party writing little tracts for each other on how to get on with the “workers”—as if the “workers” were a different biological species.

In the States there is no such caste division. The American boy grows up in a community “dedicated to the proposition that all men are born free and equal.” In cold fact they may be no more free and equal in the U.S. than we are in Britain. But because they are all of them dedicated to the proposition they do tend to behave in their social intercourse as if it were so. And that is at least the beginning of true democracy.

We’ll never get as near as that to democracy in Britain until we’ve abolished our caste system of education. I don’t think it matters much whether we all begin our educational lives at the council school or at the public school, so long as we all begin at the *same* school.

The effect of the American social atmosphere on the visiting Englishman will depend a great deal on the kind of school he went to. If he's public school, accustomed to feeling superior, and to being treated with deference by the lower orders, he'll feel affronted by the assumption of all Americans, from barbers to bank presidents, that he's no better than they are. He'll be polite to them, of course; the greater part of his early training has been devoted to equipping him with perfect manners; but his heart won't be in it. (Americans will sense that and call him a stuffed shirt.) And he will come back to England as to a warm and cosy shelter, glad to escape from American "heartiness and vulgarity."

The council school boy, on the other hand, will warm and glow in this new social atmosphere. He will feel himself blossoming like a plant brought out of the cellar into the sunshine. For the first time in his life, he will feel free to chuck out his chest to its fullest capacity. It is probable that he won't be introspective enough at the time to look for the cause of it. He will take the atmosphere for granted. He will simply notice that he feels a lot better than ever he did at home, both mentally and physically, and that he has suddenly acquired an enormous confidence in himself.

It is only when he comes back to England and goes through the old, old process of being quietly snubbed and put in his place that he realizes that the difference between the vital, ebullient self he knew in America and the soggy self he knows in England is due almost entirely to this difference in social atmospheres.

That's how this council school boy feels about it, anyway. And I say so bearing in mind all the American snags: the Negro problem, the financial class differences, the dollar complex, the small town caste divisions fostered by the little "smart sets," and all the rest of it. Most of them are mere surface vagaries compared with the deeply rooted caste differences of Europe. The point is that the American *foundations* are right. What kind of civilization Americans will succeed in building upon those foundations is another matter.

And though I didn't grasp the profound effect of this difference until I got back home, I did notice—because it was again and again remarked on—that my council school accent was a social asset in the States. Not that many Americans recognized it as council school. The American seldom distinguishes between our upper and lower class accents, *as* accents. To him both accents are simply "British." The only difference he detects is a difference in tone. And the public school (or "Oxford" or "B.B.C." whatever you like to call it) sounds to him like an offensively condescending tone.

I had many arguments about it both in the States and Canada. As a council school boy, I've had my share of being condescended to, so I knew how they felt about it, but—for all the temptation to rub a chalk off—I couldn't admit that condescension and the public school accent invariably go together. But they refused to disbelieve the evidence of

their own ears. In the majority of cases, they insisted, it *was* condescension, and the reason I didn't realize it was that, like all British workers, I was so accustomed to being condescended to that I no longer noticed it.

I couldn't let them get away with that, so we'd go to it again; until, in the end, they'd maybe tell me I wasn't a proper Englishman, I was more like an American—and how clever it was of the British Government to send me!

The implication, of course, was that the British Government was being extremely artful in sending me; and that I (being so like an American, honest and blunt, and not artful) didn't realize that I was being "used."

Nor was this view confined to anti-British Americans. The more friendly an American feels toward the British people, the more suspicious he tends to be of the British Government. Though Americans profess a contempt for the old school tie, they associate it with the British governing class and so with British diplomacy. And they dread the British diplomat. The world-picture they carry in their minds contains a portrait of a blunt, honest and generous American for ever being gypped by a suave, smiling, diabolically clever Englishman.

This surprised me. I felt that, during my own lifetime, at any rate, our British diplomats had been chiefly distinguished for their Tory short-sightedness and stupidity. And as for the innocent helplessness of the American diplomat, it seemed to me that, while international politics remained a game of catch-as-catch-can, anyone who had fought his way to the top in the jungle of American politics could have nothing to fear from the diplomats of other countries.

But I hadn't come to America to defend pre-war diplomacy, whether British or American. So I tried to keep our arguments from getting sidetracked that way. I had come as a citizen of the world, to meet my fellow-citizens; to tell them what was happening down my street, and to take a look at what was happening down theirs. My sole mission, as I saw it, was to preach the gospel of world co-operation.

And I had certainly never expected to find myself bragging about Britain. Even if I'd wanted to, I didn't feel, looking at my country from a proletarian's point of view, that there was much to brag about. But I found Americans so shockingly misinformed about the realities of British life, and particularly of the strength of our progressive movements, liberal, labour and co-operative, and the enormous part they played in the life of the country, that I found myself driven by sheer force of circumstances to bang the big drum for all I was worth. And, rather to my surprise, the louder I banged it the more my audience seemed to approve of me; and through me, of my country.

Chicagoans were eager to argue with me and to blast and shatter me with everything they'd got whenever, and that was fairly often, they disagreed with me. But they did not distrust me. They accepted my arguments as honest arguments—arguments which were either worth believing or

worth refuting. And whether we ended in agreement or disagreement, we usually ended friends.

My council school accent was an asset on American radio, too. On English radio it tends to be a drawback. A B.B.C. man once told me that English listeners distrusted information given to them in a council school accent; and I presume he had proof of it. But in the States it was the other way about. A few days after I landed, the Columbia Network invited me to do a Saturday evening coast to coast broadcast, thus giving me a splendid opportunity to introduce myself. And among the letters I received afterwards, I still cherish the one from the C.B.S. talks director telling me I was "one of the joys of broadcasting." I mention it because it gave me such a big lift—for, however strongly you may believe in yourself, you can't broadcast to the world week after week from London during a period like the blitz, and then find yourself suddenly cut off, without feeling there must be something very wrong with your stuff.

I was invited to talk from the local radio stations in nearly every town I visited. And the obvious initial doubts, and later delighted approval, of members of the station staff on nearly every occasion, thoroughly restored my confidence and completely assuaged my vanity.

I spoke from two stations in Chicago: W.B.B.M., the C.B.S. station, in the Wrigley Building (which, incidentally I had some difficulty in finding, since I persisted in asking for the Spearmint Building, and no one seemed to grasp the connection) and from W.G.N. in the equally famous Tribune Tower, the radio station belonging to Colonel McCormick, owner of the anti-British *Chicago Tribune*.

These talks had two interesting results. One was that a police sergeant called at my hotel one evening and offered to take me for a drive around the town. Most Chicago police are of Irish or German descent. This one told me he was a mixture of both. He must have made an ideal Chicago sergeant.

He wasn't able to show me much of Chicago because it was pouring with rain, and a black night.

I was more interested in the running commentary coming over the car radio: orders from Police Headquarters going out to the different cars and the reports of those cars to Headquarters. The constant flow made a continuous background to our sightseeing. It was like being God, looking out over the surface of the city and yet, at the same time, being able to hear the secret thoughts and actions of all its inhabitants. And constantly I was reminded of the polyglot nature of Chicago's four millions—the half a million Poles, quarter of a million Negroes, sixty-eight thousand Germans and the rest—and the major and minor difficulties of administration caused by that mixture.

We stopped to watch a fountain which was constantly changing colour. A few minutes previously Car "X" had reported the discovery of a man on the sidewalk, seriously injured. Headquarters had ordered an ambulance

to the spot. The rain was pelting down on the roof of our car and splashing up from the glistening wet roadway. More accidents were reported; more cars ordered to different spots. Meanwhile the fountain was running through its repertory. Then Car "X" was reporting again. The man on the sidewalk was now dead. His wife had arrived and identified him. While my sergeant driver explained how the fountain's changes were worked, the radio conversation continued:

Headquarters: "Is he white or coloured?"

Long pause.

Headquarters, sharply: "Is he white or coloured?"

Another pause. Then the car, hesitantly: "He's a Mexican."

I have told this story to a number of people, both English and American, and have never yet found anyone who could see any point in it. But I feel it does put one aspect of Chicago on a pinpoint. So, I think, does this:

I went into a cigar store to buy some cigarettes. The girl behind the counter did not look amiable. Someone had apparently upset her. I asked for my cigarettes. She looked hard at me, apparently not understanding. Probably my English accent. Smiling, I repeated my request. She resolutely refrained from smiling back, and without a word put the cigarettes on the counter. I gave her a dollar bill and remarked that it was a nice day. She looked a nice girl, too; and it seemed a pity we couldn't be friendly. But she obviously didn't feel like it. She punched the cash register and gave me change; then reached behind the counter and threw down a box of book matches alongside the cigarettes. On the box, in large blue letters on a white ground, was printed: "Thank God I'm an American!"

I read it, absorbed it, looked at her, and laughed. But she would neither smile nor speak, so I shall never know whether she meant it, or whether that box just happened to be there.

But the fact that such a sentiment should be printed at all on a match-box is a bit of a shock to an Englishman; it suggests overweening national pride and the worst kind of jingoism. But it isn't, of course. For the Pole, the German, the Austrian, the Greek, the Estonian, the Bulgar, and all the rest of those who've got away from Europe it's a heartfelt prayer of gratitude, a huge sigh of relief: "Thank God I'm an American!"

And just in case they should forget it and start going European on each other (which of course they sometimes do, since it pays certain interests to stir up the old national prejudices) the U.S. Government and many private agencies make a point of constantly reminding them of it. Even at trade union meetings, I found it was quite common for everyone to make an "affirmation" before the proceedings began—standing, facing the flag, with arm upraised.

For the internationalist, there are two ways of looking at it. You can either deplore it as yet another deliberate fostering of nationalist fervour in a world already cursed with far too much of it, or you can see it as proof that international unity is not impossible.

I looked at it in this second way. Here were these people, 140,000,000 of them, drawn from all the warring nations of the world, and yet all living peaceably together as citizens of the United States. When I looked at the faces of all these different national types gathered together in my audiences I couldn't help but feel what a great and wonderful achievement it was. On a small scale (though not all that small) it was the internationalist's dream come true. It settled once and for all the old contention that international unity is impossible because of ineradicable national antagonisms.

Admittedly, we've got a long way to go. Admittedly, there's a great danger that Americans will overdo their pride in America and become as narrowly nationalistic as any of the older nations. But their present achievement is proof that the peoples of all nations can be neighbourly if they set their minds to it. If they can become fellow-citizens of the United States of America, they can also become fellow-citizens of the United States of the World.

I often used this argument in the hope of confounding the Isolationists. But their contention, of course, was that only the better specimens of the various nations had emigrated to the States, and that therefore such a high degree of civilization was hardly possible in the outside world.

My Chicago sergeant kept to the respectable end of the town and I felt from his manner that he had no wish to show me more than that, so I did not ask him to. But in another Middle Western city I got a glimpse of the other side of the picture. I was taken out in the early hours of the morning by three detectives, raiding "joints" in the city's slums.

It began like so many of my American experiences, very much as on the pictures—the four of us in a car racing through the deserted streets, stopping suddenly at this joint or that; sometimes pouring out of the car in quick frontal assault; sometimes going quietly, picking our way with torches over rubbish-strewn bits of waste ground to hidden back entrances, to creep in upon them unawares but, more often than not, meeting with locked doors, and loudly hammering upon them with a shout of: "Open up! Open up! The police!"

And then the sound of fumbling on the other side of the door, and the slow unbolting; and the detectives, all armed, of course, brusquely shouldering their way in, with me following after—hoping that if anyone contemplated violence they'd think I'd got a gun too.

Once inside the building, usually an old frame shack, we'd go straight through the dark little hallway into the main room where, possibly, we'd just interrupted a social gathering, usually consisting of Negroes and Asiatics, now standing huddled in groups, with their eyes fixed on us—scared, ingratiating, defiant, slinking; a camera study for an Eisenstein—and all to be examined and searched one by one; and the house, too, from cellar to attic.

The squalor was bad: the filthy rooms, the frowzy beds, the human

shapes crouched in dark corners as we ruthlessly thrust our way in, the oddments of food, old clothes, pillows and empty food tins that littered the floors—it was all much worse than anything I've seen in a London slum.

The picture that stays most vividly in my mind is that of an elderly Negro woman whose house we entered unannounced by the back door; whose bedrooms we searched (much to the surprise of the startled couples they contained) and whose every cupboard, drawer and private shelf and cranny was ruthlessly turned out.

I suppose there was a good reason for all this. The detectives were presumably searching for illicit drugs. But I could hardly bear to stand by and watch without protest this ruthless turning out of all the old lady's little personal possessions, to be tumbled in a heap on the floor.

She herself took it with extraordinary calmness; a "boys will be boys" expression on her face. If she'd got anything hidden, it was evidently hidden where she was sure no detective would find it.

When the search was finished, the leader of the detectives questioned her about the couples in the bedrooms, and she assured him they were all highly respectable people. Then he asked after her adolescent daughter, and her manner changed. She said her daughter was a thoroughly bad lot, and why, she couldn't think, for she herself was a devout Catholic and had given her daughter a good Christian upbringing, and even now continued to "tan her black arse" night after night.

Apart from a few bottles of illicit liquor and a gambling device, rather like a put-and-take top, the night's raiding produced no obvious result—though perhaps the questioning and searching had provided the detectives with valuable evidence about what was happening in that particular part of the city. For me it was an extremely uncomfortable experience for, irrationally or not, I felt I was taking part in an action which could not be justified on any ethical grounds, whatever might be said for it on the score of expediency and the need to enforce the local laws. And the sight of those all too human souls in squalor made me feel that whatever case the community may have had against them, it could be as nothing compared with their case against the community.

The other interesting result of my Chicago broadcasts was the arrival of three men at my hotel one Sunday afternoon, who informed me they were a deputation from the Chicago Repertory Theatre; that they had heard me on the radio and wondered if I was the same Hodge who had written plays for the London Unity Theatre. On my telling them that I was, they were extraordinarily pleased and told me that they, like Unity, had started their theatre with Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*. Unlike the Unity people, they were mostly professionals, but they ran the Rep on an amateur basis; the Rep was their hobby—the place where they let themselves rip.

They were giving a party that evening for one of their number, a radio commentator, who had just been called up for the army, and they wanted

me to come. It turned out to be one of the finest evenings of my life. It is well enough to see first-rate actors and musicians singing for their suppers, but to see them performing for the sheer fun of it is to step up into Heaven for a while.

One morning, when the brisk wind that so often blows through Chicago had a chill in it, reminding me of my need for winter underclothes, I went into the Marshall Field department store to see what they had. After I'd refused several American admixtures of wool and cotton, the salesman said, in the reverent tone of one who speaks of materials rich and rare: "If you want the *very* best I can show you some Jaegers, specially imported from London, England."

To hear anything British spoken of so reverently in Chicago was both amusing and amazing. Of course, I bought some, feeling they were well worth their Chicago price.

But alas, my poor Jaegers! They were treated with anything but reverence by American laundries. Malevolence would be nearer the mark. The first one succumbed at its first laundry; the life of the other two was exactly seven weeks. An American hotel laundry is no place for British woollens. The rest of my British underclothes fared no better.

I discovered later that Americans who can afford British woollens, never dream of sending them to the big laundries. They usually employ their own Negro washerwoman. But even if I had learned this in time, I should have been unable to take advantage of it, since I seldom stayed in one place more than a few days at a stretch.

I spent another pleasant half-hour being shown round a high-class Chicago food store by the manager, with whom I had become friendly at one of my meetings. It specialized in obtaining foods from every part of the world for the delectation of Chicago's wealthier citizens.

In between tasting and admiring various American delicacies, I had jubilant moments when he paused here and there at an empty shelf and said sadly: "Of course, we can't keep up our old peacetime stocks. Our best jams were Chivers'." And a little further along: "Our best biscuits were Huntley and Palmer's." And again: "Our best Indian tea was Lipton's." So it went on, even down to his best peppermints: English Polar Mints.

If it had been New York I might have thought he intended subtle flattery, but I knew Chicago well enough by that time to know he was simply stating what was, for him, a sad fact. Besides, he went on to remark equally sadly on the absence of his best chocolate, Swiss; his best olive oil, French; and his best candies, Austrian.

Teasing a Chicago friend one day with a remark that, wonderful, marvellous, stupendous as Chicago was, there was one thing it couldn't do: make a cup of tea, I was told that if I hadn't had a cup of tea to my liking, it was my own fault; all I had to do was to tell the waitress how I wanted it made, and it would be produced.

I tried it at breakfast the next morning, explaining to the girl that the secret of English tea was boiling water. She was very nice about it, although the breakfast rush was on, and she obviously thought I was crackers. When I had finished explaining, she said she would bring me a tea pot with two bags of tea instead of the usual one, so as to make sure of the strength, and some boiling water; and I could make it myself.

A few minutes later, she returned with my breakfast and everything except the water which, she said, I should have to wait for, as it was being specially boiled for me.

After about a quarter of an hour, I reminded her about it and she said it was still being boiled. I finished my breakfast and then reminded her again. She went back to the service counter and returned with some water in a glass coffee jug which looked to me to be far from boiling-point. I mentioned my doubts about it, but she was insistent that it *had* boiled. I poured it on the tea but, as I had feared, it was tepid, and there was only enough water for threequarters of a cup. I said I should have to have some more. She was a very nice girl and was obviously hurt at my dissatisfaction, especially after she had been to all the trouble of getting the water specially boiled, so I told her not to bother about boiling any more but just to bring me some of her hot water.

She did, at once, and it was much hotter than the original boiled water; so, with a double quantity of tea, I did manage to get a cup of tealike liquid. If I had been more persevering I might have succeeded at last in getting exactly what I wanted, even as my Chicago friend assured me I would. But I couldn't bring myself to pester those kind and patient waitresses, who so obviously thought I was crackers, so I gave it up.

The one thing about Chicago that Chicagoans are not proud of, is the reputation the films have given their city as the home of the gangster. Though, if you harp too much on your abhorrence of gangsters, they'll soon tell you that Chicago was founded by gunmen and that Chicagoans are still as tough as ever they were. I saw no gangsters in action while I was there, but I heard plenty about them, and in one instance they affected me closely enough to make me realize that gangsterism is still a feature of American life.

On my second day in Chicago I lunched with two leaders of the Illinois C.I.O., and discussed possible meetings. Two days later, I saw a headline in my paper: "C.I.O. Leaders Slugged In Elevator," and read that my two friends were now in hospital, one of them badly injured. It seemed they had attended a meeting of workers in one of the local plants, held to decide whether they should join the independent John Lewis organization, the United Mine Workers, or the union affiliated to the C.I.O. The meeting was being held on an upper floor, and when the two C.I.O. leaders got into the elevator to go up to it, they were followed by ten or a dozen purposeful men who forced their way in past the protesting operator and made him take them down to the cellar. Once there they pulled out

the C.I.O. men, slugged them, and slung their unconscious bodies into a corner. Presumably the representatives of the John Lewis outfit then had it all their own way at the meeting.

I should have felt much better about this if the sluggers had appeared to be agents of the bosses, but there seemed to be no escaping the conclusion that it was yet another bloody skirmish in American Labour's tragic civil war.

While in Chicago, I heard the true story of Al Capone. I got it from a Chicago columnist. It seemed Al Capone's real ambition was to be Chief of Police; and it was as a Chief of Police that he regarded himself.

Let us put on one side for a moment (said my friend the columnist) the question of whether Prohibition was right or wrong; and consider simply the facts of the liquor trade under Prohibition. There was a large demand for liquor and a group of business men set out to supply that demand. Before long, a large business was built up, giving good service to the community and providing a livelihood for a large number of people. Like all businesses, it could only be run on a basis of mutual trust and good will—the certainty that all contracts entered into, all obligations undertaken, would be scrupulously fulfilled. It needed too, a stable civilization to work in, a civilization which would ensure safe conduct for its business agents, delivery trucks and so on. It needed, in short, what every other business needs if it is to function properly: a code of laws, with judges to administer them and a police force to see that they are carried out and, if necessary, to punish lawbreakers.

But since Prohibition made the selling of liquor illegal, this huge liquor business, with all the millions of capital invested in it and all the people who depended on it for a living, was completely outside the law. It was therefore without the legal protection given as a matter of course to every other business. Its agents could be robbed and its delivery trucks looted, with impunity. So the beer barons decided that the only thing for them to do was to draw up their own code of laws and to hire a police force to see that they were carried out.

Al Capone was the man who organized and commanded that police force. To think of him as a bloodthirsty gangster was all wrong. In himself he was a good, kind, upright man. He was also completely law-abiding—in the sense that he was an upholder and an enforcer of strict law and order in the liquor business. Philosophically speaking, there was no more difference between Al Capone and a regular Chief of Police than there was between a lay preacher and an ordained minister of the Church.

The only thing I've got to add to this story is that my friend the columnist was very like me in some respects, and not least in that he loved a little game of philosophic makebelieve, and was by no means averse to building up a pretty argument for that argument's sake. We met twice during my several visits to Chicago, and each time spent a quiet hour together indulging our mutual taste for this sort of thing. All the same, I believe he

was stating no more than the plain truth about the point of view of Al Capone.

One of my several short trips out of Chicago was to Madison, Wisconsin, four hours train ride away. Several of the towns on the route had Indian names, and by the time I had passed through Peewaukee and Owaukee and Milwaukee, I began to feel I was lucky to be riding. And indeed I was lucky to be riding on a train, in the comfort of a parlour car. Trips out of Chicago by bus were by no means so pleasant.

The military had first claim on all transport; and after you had waited in a crowd of civilians at the bus station for half an hour or more in order to make sure of a seat, you were apt to find that when the bus drew in you would be told to stand aside until it had filled up with a load of soldiers or sailors; after which, if there was any standing room left, civilians would be allowed to scramble for it. There is a lot to be said for this practice, I know, but it is tough on the elderly and the infirm among the civilians, who often had to stand for a three or four hour swaying and swinging bus ride, while fit young men occupied all the seats.

Travel by plane was by this time almost impossible for civilians, no matter how important their journey. Not that civilians were prohibited from air travel. There was nothing to prevent you from booking a seat from New York all the way to San Francisco. But if, at any place of call on the way, an army officer wished to travel, the civilian was put out to take his chance of another plane—this week, next week, sometime, never—while the officer took his place. I heard a story of a civilian lecturer, on his way to speak on an important technical subject at a West Coast port, who had to give up his place, half-way across, to a Colonel. He was thus prevented from fulfilling his engagement. So, too, was the Colonel. For it turned out that the Colonel's military mission was to go and hear the lecture.

My chief business in Madison was to talk at the University of Wisconsin, and to give a midday talk from the local radio station. Madison is a beautiful town, rather like one of our garden cities, in parts, but giving an air of greater spaciousness. In the newer parts of the town the original trees had been left standing on a broad strip of grass between the roadway and the houses, and the effect was of a city wrapped in greenery. This was particularly noticeable around the University buildings, as sweet a spot for meditation as ever Man devised. I was lucky enough to get a spare hour alone there, and envied the youngsters who were able to spend several years in such a paradise.

I lectured to the economics class and, as always in American universities, found them a friendly, lively and responsive audience, and sparking with eagerness to come at me with questions as soon as I had finished. What bothered them most was what they called the British "class system." It was queer to see these active young minds so alive to the iniquities of feudal British caste divisions, and yet apparently blind to the iniquities of the Capitalistic class divisions of their own country.

As a taxidriver, I was interested in Madison's flat rate taxi service—anywhere within the city limits for ten cents. It was a taxi-cum-bus system, since you had to share your cab with anyone going your way. The cabs cruised the streets all the time, usually with several passengers on board, and you took your chance of stopping one going in your general direction with room to spare. In a small town like Madison, with little or no bus competition, I imagine it paid the cabmen fairly well. They seldom seemed to have less than fifty cents worth of passengers on board. And when you consider it involved little or no completely waste mileage, and no idle time on the rank, that ten cent flat rate was probably more profitable than it sounds.

9

HAMILTON



My next invitation was from Hamilton, Ontario, to open a Victory Loan Campaign. In my experience you can always rely on the Canadian Government, whether central, provincial or civic, to do you proud. My youthful experience of being well looked after as a firefighter for the Ontario Forestry Board was now repeated (on a more expensive plane). Instead of sending me tickets for an ordinary berth, they sent me tickets for a whole bedroom. I set off from Chicago feeling like a visiting Cabinet Minister, wallowing in luxury.

The Pullman bedroom is worth describing. It is built crosswise to the train so that, in length, it is almost the full width of the train. It is about as wide as a bathroom. You get into it from the narrow corridor through a sliding door. It will berth two people, one above the other. In the daytime, the one broad seat will comfortably accommodate three. At night this seat becomes a roomy single bed, and a bunk can be let down from above for a second person. There is a full-length mirror on the door, and opposite it a smaller mirror, behind which is a cupboard containing a large aluminium vacuum flask of icewater and either a glass or the more usual cardboard cups. Below the cupboard is a cabinet which opens out to present an aluminium basin complete with hot and cold taps, and a squirter tap for the teeth. Above the mirror is the towel rack, containing half-a-dozen or more clean towels, neatly folded into small white triangles. There are eight lights; including a reading-lamp, two mirror lights, and a blue nightlight, each operated by a separate switch. There is also an adjustable heater and an electric fan. All the controls, including the light switches, are within easy reach of the bed, and include, of course, a bell to summon

the porter. On the wall opposite the main seat there is a hinged flap which can be lifted to serve as a table or writing-desk. Above it is a rack for note-paper. There are, of course, plenty of clothes hooks and hangers, and a rack for baggage. But the most ingenious arrangement of all is the second seat, a small squarish upholstered seat, alongside the washing cabinet. When it is lifted up, it uncovers the "toilet," complete with glossy black hardwood seat, polished aluminium pan, and a neatly socketed roll of paper. To flush it, you press your foot on a pedal on the floor, rather like a car clutch pedal. And to crown everything there is a wedged-shaped hassock for the feet—presumably to give you the perfect position for the performance.

But there is one great drawback to the bedroom layout. When lying on the bed you lie crosswise to the train, and as American trains, for all their interior comforts, do not run anywhere nearly as smoothly as ours, you are apt to be violently awakened at every start and stop. The jerks, jars and jolts that the passenger on an American train suffers every time it starts and stops have to be experienced to be believed. If you've ever watched empty trucks being assembled into a train by a shunting engine in a British railway marshalling yard, you'll have some idea of it. It may, of course, be due to the length and heaviness of American trains, or to some difference in the system of brakes and couplings, but since I found a similar harshness in the handling of American road vehicles I'm inclined to think it must be due to a national difference in temperament rather than to one of mechanical construction or driving skill. When you are lying crosswise to the train your fear of being jerked clean out of bed at any moment makes it difficult to compose your mind to sleep.

On my trip to Hamilton, my delight in the unaccustomed luxury helped to keep me awake. I lay on the bed, my eyes roving the room, anxious not to miss one jot or tittle of it. The five white towels, in all their white triangular beauty on the rack above, especially held me. The last time I had ridden through Ontario I had been stealing a ride on a freight train, and had buried myself in a load of coal so that the conductor shouldn't find me.

It tickled me now to think how useful those towels would have been then. I looked at them for a long time, and was amused for a long time, going over and over again in my mind the details of that stolen ride: how I had first ridden on the buffers between the box cars, and how the conductor had ordered me off, and how I had hidden myself by snuggling down into that open car full of coal. And how proud and pleased with myself I had been. And how at length I had laid me down in the dirt and the nobbly bits and gone peacefully off to sleep, never dreaming that one day I should be visiting Ontario again all lapped in luxury.

It then occurred to me to look at my watch. It was three a.m. The train was rushing on hollowly through the night. I'd had no sleep. I needed sleep. I'd had a worrying and tremendously busy time in Chicago. In the

morning it would begin all over again at Hamilton. I had to have sleep. But sleep was the one thing I couldn't command. And before the night was out, I was beginning to feel that after all I'd been happier as a hobo, sleeping in a hollow in a heap of coal with a hobo's carefree mind.

I arrived at Hamilton at breakfast-time next morning, and immediately started in on my programme. My chief memories are of the Mayor, and the talk we had together, of an old and precious sherry which I was privileged to taste at a Hamilton club and which went down like nectar and then made your fingertips tingle, and of the evening when Hamilton's largest cinema suspended its film programme and was put at my disposal for two performances. The sweetest memory of that evening is standing with the manager watching the local steelworkers and their wives coming in, and hearing him sigh and say he wished they'd come in like that for the film shows.

The Mayor, who was a paid official, the city's business manager, was very full of a visit he had made to London just before the war. "Visitors talk about your wonderful police," he said, "but it isn't the police, it's the people—so tidy, so orderly. Your police have got an easy job."

And he went on to tell me of what he had seen one day when walking "on Shaftesbury"—an accident; the crowd that immediately gathered; the policeman coming up and saying quietly: "move along there, please," and the crowd breaking up and going about its business. He sighed. "I wish we could get people to behave like that here."

I gathered, not from him, but from the men who had arranged my meetings, that the problem of controlling crowds was a little on his mind at that time, for I was asked to "keep off politics" in my speeches. And on my pointing out that I couldn't, since politics was the core of nearly everything I had to say, they hastened to explain that by politics they meant local politics, and specifically the imminent battle between the C.I.O. and the hitherto unchallenged Steel Company Unions (Hamilton produces 55 per cent of Canada's steel).

As always in such cases, I left the local dispute alone (I knew nothing about it, anyway) and contented myself with telling the steel workers something of the achievements of the British Labour Movement, and leaving them to draw their own conclusions.

My worst memory of Hamilton is of feeling dead to the world after my first house at the cinema, wondering how I could possibly succeed in getting through the second (due to commence in a few minutes, as soon as the building had emptied and filled), and being told by a shocked chairman that it would be breaking all the laws of God and man to bring me a drink backstage.

Fortunately, a third person overheard, took pity on me, and while not prepared to take the awful risk of bringing drink into the building, did hurry me out to a nearby "Beverage Room" where I was able to get a Bass. It was forbidden to buy a drink of whisky in a Hamilton bar—but

beer is best when you are talking in a large theatre without the aid of a mike, as I was that evening. Beer brings out the deep chest notes. (And to make sure of reaching the back row of the circle with ease, I followed the beer with a little vaseline.)

While sitting at a table in the crowded Beverage Room with the precious minutes rushing by and no immediate prospect of being served, I suggested to my companion that we should step up to the bar and get our drinks. But he told me it was against the law to drink standing at the bar; only the accredited waiter was allowed to get them. It was also against the law to bring a woman into the place—though there were, I was told, certain Ladies' Beverage Rooms set apart for them.

The only way to buy whisky was first to obtain a licence to do so, costing twenty-five cents, and then to take that licence to a government liquor store where you could buy it only by the bottle, to take away and consume in private. Which explains, I suppose, why the corridors of the hotel I stayed at were littered with drunks.

I found this true of Canada and the States as a whole. Such public drunkenness as I saw was in towns where the liquor laws were strict. Where the saloons were "wide open" and you could buy any drink you fancied at any time you fancied it, I saw no drunkenness at all.

One constant surprise all through my tour was the curious (and, on my part, often unconscious) little things people would praise after a speech. One of the men who was running the Hamilton meetings, picked out, I think, the oddest thing of all. After talking about what he was pleased to call my naturalness on the platform, he said: "But the finest bit was at the end—the way you sat down and lit a cigarette. It was such a simple and natural action and it's never been done in Hamilton before." (The reason probably being that smoking in the cinema was forbidden; but I didn't remind him of that.)

It is better I think for the speaker not to be told about that sort of thing (unless it is something that gives offence), for if he is a modest man it is apt to make him self-conscious about it, and if he is a vain man he is apt to take note of it and repeat it deliberately next time for the sake of effect—though in this case I was in no danger, for my need for a cigarette as soon as I had finished talking was always so great as to put all other considerations out of mind.

My one free evening in Hamilton was ruined by an A.R.P. practice. I had promised myself a happy evening at the pictures; but just as I was about to leave the hotel, the warning went. All the lights went out, both inside and outside the building; all traffic stopped, too; and I was informed by one of the A.R.P. officials that no one was allowed on the street. The only thing to do was to stay in my room where, since the electricity was turned off at the mains, I couldn't even have the solace of the radio.

I don't know which was the more maddening, the enforced helpless idleness, or the heavy seriousness with which the practice was taken. It

only lasted half an hour, but before the lights went on again, it had affected my nerves so badly that I was beginning to feel almost worse than in an actual raid.

This, it seemed to me, was the worst way to meet it. On psychological grounds alone, you can't beat the British method of (so far as possible) business as usual. Yet this was something I had great difficulty in persuading Americans to believe. Many of them had got it fixed in their minds that our keeping at work during air-raids was "only a propaganda story." And when, as I think I did, I convinced some of them of its truth, I was still often unable to convince them of its common sense. They seemed unable to conceive of it except as sheerly romantic bravery.

The most satisfactory thing I saw in Hamilton, for there's nothing so satisfactory as first-rate workmanship, was the job done by the woman reporter who interviewed me for the *Hamilton Spectator*.

There was hardly a newspaper in any of the towns I visited which didn't do me proud—one way or another. This woman from the *Hamilton Spectator*, however, unlike the artistic and atmospheric type of reporter who scorns to be seen using anything more reportorial than the back of a carefully accidental envelope, sat with a writing-pad on her knee and took down all I had to say as unashamedly as if she had been a shorthand typist. Then she went away and produced a column summary in her paper, true to the letter in her direct quotations and true to the spirit in her summing up. It ranked with the best half dozen jobs of reporting I've ever had performed on me, either in this country or America.

10

CHANGE FOR A QUARTER



FROM Hamilton I had to get to Cleveland, Ohio, and as a free Sunday intervened at this point I thought I might as well go a little out of my way to see Niagara Falls. I therefore left the train at Welland and took a bus to the town of Niagara, on the United States side of the falls. Crossing the border, we were stopped by the usual border officials, but when I informed them of my business they did not trouble with me, though the other three passengers on the bus had to take their bags into the Customs shed for examination. For once, I didn't get worked up into a passion about national barriers.

When we reached the bus terminus, I dumped my bags at the railroad station and found out the time of the next train to Buffalo (to connect

with the main line to Cleveland), and then strolled back to have a look at the falls.

I wasn't so impressed as I had expected to be. The fact was that the man-made wonders of New York and Chicago had spoiled me for a mere natural wonder. If they'd had the Niagara Falls in Chicago they'd have made the water flow up instead of down, just as they made the Chicago river run backwards, and then indeed there would have been something to marvel at.

After taking a good look from the United States side I remembered I had been told the view from the Canadian side was more impressive, so I innocently set out to walk across the international bridge. But there were obstacles in the shape of a United States Immigration Office at one end of the bridge and a Canadian one at the other. The United States man on my side explained that, being an alien, I ought to have a special permit, but when I told him this might be my only chance to see the view from the other side, he let me through, with a warning to be sure to come through his particular gate (there was one on either sidewalk) when I returned.

The view I liked best was from the bridge itself (called the Rainbow Bridge, because the sun shining on the fine spray from the falls arches it with a rainbow).

When I got to the other side, the Canadian man was waiting to go through my papers, and when I explained I'd only come over to look at the view, he looked a bit worried, and said: "Well, it's all right with me, but I can't see how you're going to get back into the States again." I explained the diplomatic arrangement on the U.S. side and he let me through.

After looking my fill I returned without any trouble to the United States again. But once there, I thought I'd go down in the cliff lift and take a look at the falls from below. The price for this was ten cents. Having used my only two dimes to pay the bridge tolls, I went to the change desk to split a quarter so as to get a dime to put in the lift turnstile. I put the quarter on the counter and the cashier pushed two dimes and a nickel toward me, then suddenly snatched them back, turned over the quarter, laughed the laugh of one who was no sucker, pitched it back at me and exclaimed: "*I thought there was something wrong with it!*"

And then, as I examined the quarter in my turn, failing to see anything wrong: "Look at it! It's Canadian. We don't take Canadian money in *this* country."

The implication of his tone flicked my nasty little temper. Looking back on it, it all seems ridiculous enough, and not least my own behaviour. But somehow it hit me then as the final insult in all this damfool barrier business. So although I had plenty of United States currency in my pocket, I took back my Canadian quarter and walked off, hoping that the expression of my dignified back would convince him that I thought even less of him and his cliff lift than he did of my money.

The train to Buffalo was a local train made up of old-fashioned day

coaches, slow and with uncomfortable seats, a great contrast to the luxury travel of the main line expresses. The passengers were more interesting, though. I got a good deal of delight from watching a group of Negroes a little further down the coach: a girl and three boys in their teens, with an older woman who looked as if she was their mother—all coal black and very merry. After a while the youngest son went to sleep and the next youngest, sitting next to him, put his hand into the sleeper's pocket and with great care extracted a packet of candies, put one in his mouth, and put the packet back.

This caused enormous merriment, particularly to the stealer of the candy. I had heard a lot about the Negro's capacity for merriment, but this was the first time I had been able to see it for myself; and it is something that has to be seen to be appreciated. It seems to spring from a joy in living such as we whites can feel only in a thin and adulterated form; it is as different as cream from skimmed milk.

I watched them, sucking into myself some of their joy at secondhand, until the candy stealer, whose back was toward me, seemed suddenly to become aware of my gaze. He glanced back over his shoulder, caught my eye before I could withdraw it, and immediately was covered with shame, choking over his candy. I felt I had spoiled everything. I must have a grim expression.

At Buffalo I changed on to the main-line train for Cleveland—the famous Empire State Limited, with all seats reserved; the last word in comfort and luxury. Streamlined, polished aluminium, with a separate easy chair for each passenger, and daylight neon lights in the roof over each chair, and a Negro steward to attend to your slightest wish. I soon fell into a doze in my deep chair, and while I was asleep the ever-hovering steward switched out my light in case it should trouble my eyes. When I awoke I fancied a cigarette, so I rang for him to bring an ash-tray. Before we ran into Cleveland he came again to dust my shoes and brush my hat. Daft, isn't it? So very grand and so very lonely!

11

THE MACHINE-MAD MEN OF DETROIT



I SPENT a first-rate week in Cleveland talking mainly to trade union locals, both A.F. of L. and C.I.O., then came back to Chicago for meetings with the Chicago Bar Association and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and then on to Detroit.

I had expected Detroit, the motor-car factory of the world, to be chiefly

interesting from the motor-car angle. But I found it much more interesting as the place where the two big human conflicts of America—Capital versus Labour, and White versus Negro—were bubbling in full spate. When you raised these subjects in other towns you could always be sure of starting an argument, but when you mentioned them in Detroit you touched off an explosion.

My tour was confined to the Northern States, so I got no opportunity of seeing conditions in the deep South, nor did I get an opportunity to meet and talk with many Negro Americans, even in the North. There were no meetings booked for me with Negro organizations and, with the exception of an occasional Negro at C.I.O. meetings, I saw none among my audiences. I had hoped, in spite of this, to make some private contacts, but as my time between public meetings was crammed with private parties—nearly all of which turned out to be simply smaller public meetings—I made no closer contact with Negro-Americans than I should have made among the tenantry of an English village while spending a week-end at milord's country seat.

This would have been unforgivable in me if I had been master of my time. And even as it was I felt unhappy about it. But, as a British official pointed out to me when I asked for time to do a little looking round on my own account, I was in the States "as a speaker, not as an observer"—the inference being that any time I spent with my mouth shut was time wasted. So when I did meet Negro-Americans, I met them fleetingly, as men meet in passing while doing different jobs; one or the other, or both, with no time to talk.

I had plenty of opportunity for contacts with Pullman sleeping-car porters, of course; but they were always very much on the job, and not easily getatable on a man to man level. Company regulations or personal preference kept their relations with passengers on a strictly professional basis.

The Negroes I remember particularly are three: a beautiful elevator girl in Chicago, a baggage porter in New York, and another baggage porter at Buffalo. The elevator girl stays with me because of the aforementioned beauty. She was a darling. We had time to look at each other, and like what we saw, and smile; but time for no more than that. As for the two baggage porters, "redcaps," the reason I was able to talk to them was that in each case my outgoing train was late, and they were standing by with my luggage.

The one in New York, a heavily built man in his twenties, opened the ball himself by asking if I was English, and on my telling him I was, asked if there was any colour bar in England. I told him there wasn't; but that there was no similar racial problem in England, either. He then (having more confidence in our racial outlook than I had) said there could never be a colour bar in England; our behaviour to the Negro-American troops proved it.

I suggested that things were much easier for Negroes in the Northern States, in New York, for instance, than in the South. He disagreed; said it only looked that way. "They don't keep us down so openly in the North," he said, "that's the only difference." And went on to tell me he was a university graduate, but could get no job except that of baggage porter.

He was obviously what comfortable people call a "malcontent." And his spirit was broken. He shot spite one minute; oozed self-pity the next. Whether he had failed to get and keep a better job because of his temperament, or whether he had acquired his temperament as a result of being barred from better jobs, was difficult to decide during that five-minute talk. But his whole outlook was so like my own had been, in similar circumstances, that I was inclined to blame the circumstances. All the same, he was uncongenial company. (As I suppose I was when in his case; though I think I was more of a kicker than a moaner, probably because I never entirely lost faith in my own power to do something about it.)

The man at Buffalo was a different type: a middle-aged, quiet and kindly man; tall, thin, scholarly. We got into conversation on my apologizing for keeping him waiting in the train queue when he was obviously in great demand elsewhere. I know as a taxidriver how annoying it is to be kept waiting by one customer worth, at the most, only one tip, when you might be gathering up three or four tips in the same time from the press of other customers all round. I suggested he should leave me at the track gates and go after the other jobs. But he smiled and said he might as well be attending to one person as another. The reason for the shortage of redcaps, he said, was that many of them had left to go into munition plants ("Defense" plants, as the Americans still insisted on calling them) attracted by the much higher wages. I asked him why he hadn't gone too. He said he didn't want to lose his seniority in his present job. I asked him how long he'd held it. Twenty-six years, he said.

"What!" I exclaimed. "And still a baggage porter?"

It wouldn't have been remarkable in England, perhaps; but it certainly was in the States, where the promotion of anyone obviously a little above the ordinary is usually swift. This man was obviously well above the ordinary, both in native intelligence and acquired culture.

He smiled tolerantly at my surprise. "It's my colour," he said; and added: "But there, it's the Lord's will. Everything comes from the Lord." And once again he smiled—the smile of one above petty ambition and in tune with the infinite. Not that I know what that means; the experience is beyond me. But he evidently did; it was in his face. When I suggested that the Lord helps those who help themselves, he brushed the thought aside as if it had been an irrelevant fly, and went on talking about the Lord and the Lord's will until the train came in.

My own impression of Negroes in general (in the North) was that they felt much the same about their social status as do the working classes in

this country. Some resented it and fought to raise the status of Negroes as a whole; others resented it only in a personal way, fought only on personal grounds, and had their spirit broken in the hopeless battle. Others, again, toadied to the whites, and presumably led a "white" fantasy life, similar to the "genteel" fantasy life of many of our own lower paid workers.

Typical of this group was the Negro hotel porter I heard about in Detroit who, seeing an apparently white woman booking a room, denounced her to the white manager as having some Negro blood in her veins. She was accordingly cast out. The reason the porter gave for denouncing her was that black trash had no business to be giving itself white airs.

The vast majority seemed to take their social position for granted, making the best of things as they were, without any strong urge to change them—though in times of crisis, of local or national upheaval, they instinctively ranged themselves, in sympathy if not in physical fact, with the militant members of their racial-social group.

The attitude of most of the whites in the North struck me as being very similar to the attitude of most well-to-do people in this country toward the working classes. Many of them were full of kindly feelings toward the Negroes, so long as the Negroes were grateful and kept their place. But any claim for real equality was bitterly resented, and looked upon as base and inexplicable ingratitude.

There is also the deep racial hatred that lies below reason and is so much more powerful than reason in motivating human action. It is easy to understand why trouble breaks out between black and white workers, when the whites fear the competition of the blacks for the available jobs, but it isn't so easy to understand the kind of trouble that breaks out between black and white soldiers of the American army, for instance, where wages and conditions are the same for both races, and there is no competition.

The kind of thing I mean is the deep-down stuff—like an English incident related by Roi Ottley in New York's *PM*:

"A Negro soldier had an appointment with a British girl to meet him in front of his camp. When he got outside she was engaged in conversation with two white American soldiers. The Negro soldier walked over and greeted the girl. 'I've been waiting about fifteen minutes for you,' she scolded cheerfully. They smiled, locked hands, and walked down the road. One of the white soldiers snatched off his hat and flung it to the ground. He broke into tears and kept repeating over and over: 'I'm from Georgia and I just can't take that!'"

I had a similar experience in Detroit. At one of my meetings I met the English manager of a local motor business. He offered to call for me next day and show me around the town. His boss came too. Everything went well until, over lunch, the boss went into a long tirade against Negroes

(apropos of the many Negroes coming to work in the Detroit munition plants). The Englishman kept very quiet when this started, giving his attention solely to his food. I, as guest, listened politely; having no wish to stir up trouble on what was intended to be a pleasure trip. But when the boss, at the end of his tirade, asked me point blank for my opinion, I couldn't say other than what I thought, which was (and I put it as mildly and delicately as I knew how) that given the educational advantages and other opportunities of the whites, the Negroes would be much the same as ourselves, simply more or less tolerable human beings.

The effect of this was awful. He was in the act of swallowing food as the words "human beings" hit him, and for a moment I thought he was going to choke. Then, with an effort, he managed to swallow, while sweat burst out all over his chunky, square-jawed face. Then he dropped his eyes to his plate and there was a silence. Several long moments passed, then the Englishman cleared his throat and asked a question about the Edgware Road, and I answered it, and the meal went on. But though we were together for two hours after that, the boss took no further part in the conversation; and, when we parted, it was as much as he could do to say good-bye.

These feelings go too deep for argument. Neither statesman nor philosopher, it seems to me, can hope to alter them. It's a job for the psychiatrists. But I doubt whether psychiatrists know enough about their subject as yet to be able to do much to help our own generation.

The hatred of most of the Detroit business men I met for organized labour went almost as deep. But that I found easier to understand. They believed labour organization threatened their pockets and their power. And I was familiar with the same kind of emotional reaction in England. The only difference was that in Detroit it was much nearer the surface. In England it is heavily disguised on all formal occasions (disguised, possibly, even from the speaker himself) as an admiration for what he calls "sane" labour, and a pained surprise at the doings of "agitators" and "extremists."

Go to a high-class party and listen to some kindly lady guffing away about the heroism of her charwoman during the blitz, and then suggest a political reform that would do her charwoman some real good, and you'll see what I mean. All her sweet reasonableness will go by the board; she'll come at you spitting and snarling like a bitch at a burglar.

You could get the same effect from a Detroit business man at the mere mention of the word "union" or "Roosevelt" (Roosevelt, of course, being the diabolical villain who made collective bargaining a legal right). Most American business men I met were content to say of Roosevelt: "He's our commander-in-chief in this war and therefore we're loyal to him, *but . . .*" And then would follow a long list of his iniquities. But in Detroit, to mention Roosevelt was like plunging a pin into the valve of a high pressure tyre.

It was here, of course, that the big battles were fought just before the

war between the C.I.O. Auto Workers' Union and General Motors, and with Henry Ford. The famous sit-down strike at Flint was still a sore subject with the motor manufacturers. They'd recently got out a pamphlet entitled "Sit-Down," containing photographs of strike pickets carrying pick handles, strikers overturning motor-cars, and so on—but of course no photographs of policemen and vigilantes beating up the strikers. This pamphlet was part of a lobbying campaign to persuade Congress to make new labour laws whittling down the rights given to organized labour under the Wagner Act. Big Business, which itself had defied the law by refusing to recognize the worker's legally constituted organizations, now had the gall to publish this pamphlet purporting to give the criminal records of some of the strikers. I brought a copy home with me, and started showing it around as a curiosity, but I find it is so well done that people swallow it whole. So now I keep it solely for the amusement of myself and the less easily deluded of my friends.

The legal argument invoked by the employers was that the strikers, by sitting down at their benches, were trespassing on the employers' property. The reply of the workers' representatives was that the worker had a property right in his job and was therefore entitled to stay in the factory and protect his property from blacklegs. A very neat argument, I thought—though, of course, not of much use against tear gas, vomiting gas, and the like. The strikers, as the employers are careful to show in their photographs, found that fire hoses trained on their attackers from the roof were much more persuasive. (Most of these recent battles in and around Detroit, by the way, were not so much wage disputes as fights for simple union recognition.)

I had some interesting talks with executives of some of the Detroit plants. These are the men, the works manager class, who will hold the key positions under any system of society. As was to be expected in Detroit, those I met took the present capitalist system for granted. For them it was the best possible method of production and distribution Man could devise. One, in particular, defended it on moral grounds; holding that since human society could only improve through the efforts of each individual toward self-improvement, it followed that the evils of the capitalist system were not peculiar to the system, but the result of the wickedness in human nature. It was our duty therefore to defend the splendid achievements of Big Business, smash the wicked workers' organizations (always excepting Company Unions), and at the same time spread moral enlightenment—especially among the workers. Their employers, of course, were so morally enlightened already as hardly to need any more of it. The great evil of the unions was that they prevented the individual workman from working where he pleased, as long as he pleased, and for what wages he pleased.

At first, I thought the men who argued like this took me for a first-class mug; for surely they themselves, managing these great automobile

industries, and concerned with the hiring and firing and the fixing of wages of thousands of workers, couldn't help but be aware of the helpless position of the individual worker as against the employer. But, as so often in cases where a man's belief seems in direct opposition to the facts of his experience, I found these denouncers of trade unions were usually quite sincere in what they said. Somehow they were able to divide their minds into completely separate compartments, one of which took for granted their own dictatorial powers over thousands of their fellowmen, while the other saw a monstrous attack on freedom in the institutions those men set up in self-protection.

It seemed to me, too, that some of these mass production executives had gone machine mad—just as a boxer sometimes goes punch drunk and a soldier bomb happy. They had ceased to be able to think in terms of human beings, and were now capable of thinking only in terms of units of energy. The mere fact that a human being had to pause occasionally to blow his nose had become an irritating nuisance, upsetting the perfect synchronization of the machines; while the fact that, on top of the natural drawback of having to stop for long periods to sleep and eat, this unit of energy actually went out of its way to build up organizations to express its will, was an evil and monstrous outrage—a filthy insult to the exquisitely beautiful machines.

No one, of course, said this in so many words. But you got the feeling that that was how many of them saw their world. So long as you talked about machinery and machine organization, they were sane and often brilliant men; but as soon as you touched on the human element they went crazy. It was the one unit of energy they couldn't blueprint and circumscribe; the one unknowable factor; the one flaw.

The milder mannered among them, remembering I was a British trade unionist, were gentler in their condemnation of workers' organizations—saying that if only American unions were as "sane," co-operative and honest as the British unions, employers might find it possible to work with them. They argued that, in Britain, employers were so slow in spotting and promoting good men that many a good man could make a career for himself only in the labour movement; therefore the British labour movement got first-rate leaders. In America, on the other hand, all the good men were immediately snapped up by employers forever on the look out for talent, so that the American labour movement got only the dregs to lead it—gangsters, unemployables and Red Agitators.

As one whose talents have never got him (in the business world) beyond the kind of job advertised as: "Man wanted, strong, willing, and not afraid of hard work," I couldn't help admitting the force of their argument about the obtuseness of British employers. I was also willing to admit, with private reservations, all they said about the brilliant leadership of British Labour. (By comparison with that of some other countries, at any rate.) There was a great deal of truth, too, in their contention that

American employers were quick to spot a man with initiative. Many a promising trade union official has gone that road. And in America, still mainly devoted to the gospel of individual "success," he has gained rather than lost prestige among his mates by doing so.

What I found difficult to believe, however, was the argument—used by business men all over America—that many American trade unions were led by gangsters and racketeers. At first I was inclined to class these stories with the "agitator" stories some of our own newspapers print whenever a strike is threatened, but conversations with American trade unionists soon convinced me that there was a foundation of truth in the labour-racketeer stories. The fact is that all American life is riddled with racketeering, and the labour movement has had its share.

One of the first things the British trade unionist has to grasp is that, prior to the rise of the C.I.O., ideas of social reform played little part in the official philosophy of American unionism. The old American craft unions lacked our co-operative, socialistic and reformist leadership. There were, of course, many social reformers among the leaders, but they were seldom the men who controlled policy and made the official pronouncements. Officially, many unions made a virtue of the fact that they were *not* concerned with improving the social system. The object of most of the older craft unions was no more than that of the capitalistic combine—more money for their own members, and to hell with everybody else.

It is significant that while a similar group in England would employ an "organizer" to strengthen the membership by gathering in as many workers in that trade as possible, the American group would employ a "business agent" whose primary job was to increase the price of labour—even if it meant keeping the local membership restricted in order to get a scarcity price. If the business agent followed this shortsighted method of restriction, he soon became faced with the necessity of discouraging non-unionists from working in the district, and employers from employing them. And it was this "discouragement" that offered such glorious openings for the gangster.

This sort of thing became quite a feature of many a small, local racketeering union, particularly in the building and trucking industries. (And once the business agent had got everything thoroughly organized, he could, if he were a true son of free enterprise, blithely go ahead and double-cross everybody, to his own great advantage, by making employers pay him for the privilege of employing non-union labour, and making non-union workers pay him as much as ten dollars a week per man for "permit to work" cards.)

The whole position was further complicated, especially in the building and road transport industries with their multiplicity of small firms, by the competition between employers for the available business. Gangsters were often hired, and union business agents bribed, to prevent a competitor from fulfilling his contracts. Things got so tough at times that the

worker had to be his own gangster. During Chicago's taxi war, for instance, when two taxi companies were fighting each other for a monopoly, the first question asked of the would-be taxi-driver was: "Can you fight?" then "Can you use a gun?" and only thirdly and fourthly "Can you drive?" and "Do you know the city?" It must have been tough on the passengers. What the Chicago cabmen needed was some of our old ladies from South Kensington. They'd soon have put a stop to that nonsense.

Another way by which gangsters got into even some of the genuine trade unions was through being called in to protect the members against the anti-union armed thugs and "private-detectives" hired by the big employers. On the face of it, it looked easier, simpler and safer for members and officials to hire "protection" than to actively protect themselves. But what happened in the case of some of these unions was what has happened so often in human history—what happened, for instance, in the case of Hitler and Mussolini—the gangster called in to protect the *status quo* suddenly turned and used his armed force to take control for himself. Discussing this with a C.I.O. organizer, I said I failed to understand how gangsters and racketeers could retain control of a genuine trade union—for surely the outraged members would vote them out of office at the next election?

He laughed. "Suppose the executive committee decides not to hold an election? Besides, have you ever tried to vote away a man with a gun?" And he went on to tell me of a case within his own experience of a small union whose members had tired of being run by racketeers, and had worked up such an agitation that the executive committee was forced to take notice of it. The leader of the dissentients was invited to attend a special meeting of the executive to consider the members' grievances. With what seems, after the event, almost criminal folly, he went alone. A few minutes after he had entered the committee room, the police received a telephone call to come and collect the body. A man, said the secretary, had suddenly burst in upon them and threatened them with a gun, and they had been compelled to shoot him in self-defence.

(Which points the remark of a certain union executive to me, in a town that shall be nameless: "We've got no agitating bastards in *our* union." When he got up to address the meeting, however, I was pleased to find he was mistaken.)

But I still wasn't satisfied with the C.I.O. man's explanation. Couldn't the members cut the ground from under the feet of the gangsters by simply refusing to pay their union subscriptions until they got a new executive committee? My friend pointed out that the problem was seldom as straightforward as that. A lot depended, of course, on the individuals within that particular union, but in many cases the majority would be willing to turn a blind eye toward the corruption and racketeering of a leader provided he "delivered"—that is, maintained a relatively high standard of living for the membership.

Let me repeat that this picture is by no means true of the American Labour Movement as a whole. The progressive labour legislation of the last ten years or so, under Roosevelt, making collective bargaining legal and compelling employers to recognize and deal with the elected representatives of their work people, has tended to make gangsterism and racketeering less and less a feature of the movement. The rise of the C.I.O., too, has put many of the old hole and corner unions out of existence. But you can't understand the peculiar problems of American labour organization—any more than you can understand American business, American politics or even American justice—without taking racketeering into account.

The marvel is, when you dip anywhere into the history of American labour organization, that the determination of the workers to organize, the workers' faith in their own power to set their world right, has risen triumphant over the violent and unscrupulous opposition of the employers, the millions of dollars poured out like water in payment to labour spies, professional strike breakers and the like, the use of police, judges, and the whole legal machinery of City and State as the private weapon of the employers against the workers, and the thousand and one insidious propaganda tricks used daily in the Press to alienate the community from each small local group of workers struggling for their elementary human rights. We've had our share of struggle in this country, I know; but compared with the bitterness, treachery and bloodshed of labour's fight for recognition in the States, our own Capital versus Labour contest looks like a P.S.A. Brotherhood meeting.

Even to-day, in spite of Labour's newly acquired legal rights, the battle for those rights still has to be fought with employers who openly defy the labour laws. The violence still goes on. I met C.I.O. organizers with faces battered, weltd and pulped like those of airmen who've crashed or been burned.

One of these battered men told me he got his while trying to organize the Ford workers. The vigilantes caught him and beat him up, but some of his comrades rescued him and got him away to a hotel. The vigilantes waited outside, determined to get him as soon as he came out. Fortunately, a friend who was a Press photographer turned up, and got him away to safety by threatening to take a picture of the scene if the vigilantes interfered. Incidentally, one of the indirect methods the union men used to break down Henry Ford's refusal to recognize the union was to go around the State as travelling salesmen and to warn every housewife they called upon not to buy that year's model Ford as they knew from inside information that it was a dud. This tactic, I was told, was more powerful in persuading the Ford Company of the union's legal right to recognition than any of the more normal and straightforward approaches.

Another organizer told me of an even more persuasive tactic—this for preventing bloodshed. In one non-union town, as soon as the rumour got

around that the unions intended to come and organize it, a private army of vigilantes was formed, ostensibly to protect property but actually, of course, to beat up any union organizer who should dare to set foot in the town. The union man in charge of the job, instead of defying this ban and risking bloody battle and probable defeat, went instead to the biggest employer's New York mansion, demanded an interview, got it, and told him that if, when the union organizers entered the town, any one of them was attacked, the union men would not attempt to fight it out in the town, but would come and "get" that employer in person. This argument sounded so logical to the employer that he immediately appreciated Labour's legal right to collective bargaining, called off his vigilantes and threw the town wide open to the union organizers.

During the war, most of this open violence has ceased. There is co-operation of a sort in the interests of war production. The employers, however, continue to fight strenuously, both in State and Federal governments, for more and more restrictive labour legislation. The Labour organizations, meanwhile, are striving to consolidate the tremendous gains of the last few years. As soon as Germany and Japan are defeated, violent war between Capital and Labour will probably break out again—for the big employers show no signs of gracefully accepting defeat in this matter of Labour's right to collective bargaining.

The educational department of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union issues a poster with a picture of a bunch of bananas, and underneath it: "Stick to your union bunch, or you'll get skinned." True at any time anywhere; but about to be particularly true, it seems to me, in the post-war United States.

It will be a tragedy if American Labour fails to achieve unity in its own ranks before that time comes. The split between the Right and Left wings began when some of the leaders of the American Federation of Labour, facing up to the pressing need for organizing the workers in the mass-production industries on an industrial basis (that is, on the principle of one industry, one union, instead of one craft, one union) found itself hampered by the vested interests of the old craft unions. To the outside onlooker it seems only commonsense that a carpenter employed in an automobile factory, for instance, should be a member of the same union as the man tightening nuts on the assembly line, but it might not, and often did not, strike the old craft union leaders that way. Meanwhile, the mass-production workers remained unorganized. Finally, in 1935, when all attempts to move the A.F. of L. to action had failed, eight of the more progressive unions, including the miners and the garment workers, set up a committee to tackle the job: the Committee for Industrial Organization. Their success was immediate and tremendous. Starting out with 1,000,000 members, the C.I.O. organized the auto, rubber and steel industries to such good effect that, in three years, membership had risen to 4,000,000.

The reply of the now almost exclusively-right wing A.F. of L. was to

expel the C.I.O. unions from membership, with the result that the Committee for Industrial Organization became a separate group, calling itself the Congress of Industrial Organizations. At the time of writing, January 1945, the two groups are equally strong, with about 6,000,000 members each.

My own impression was that while there were many good men among the city and state leaders of the A.F. of L., the top leaders tended to be backward and conservative, sticking to the old Gompers tradition that organized labour had no business with anything outside wages and hours. The C.I.O., on the other hand, seemed to have much more of the social reforming spirit of our own labour movement; its leadership struck me as being younger, better educated, more virile, more politically minded, far less careerist and certainly far more inspired. The A.F. of L. leaders were more like business men; the C.I.O. leaders more like evangelists.

The latest C.I.O. development, Sidney Hillman's Political Action Committee, which did so much to organize labour support for Roosevelt in the 1944 elections, is the most promising sign yet.

To my mind, the great weakness of the American labour movement has been its lack of direct political representation—especially in City and State government. Lacking their own Labour Party, union leaders have been compelled to play local politics much as an angler plays a fish; and to ignore everything outside the day-to-day bread and butter needs of their own little group.

This is particularly the case with local leaders of municipal workers. It is the job of the truckdrivers' business agent, for example, to see that his union backs the winning candidate in the municipal elections, whatever that candidate's political views. If he backs a loser, his truckdriver members working for the City council will soon be out of a job, for the winning candidate will distribute those jobs as rewards to his own supporters. I use truckdrivers as an example because, as a motordriver, I find it easier to speak in terms of my own trade, but the same thing applies, of course, over almost the whole field of City and State employment, both direct and indirect, extending in some cases even to the City librarians and schoolteachers.

At their 1944 convention, the C.I.O. decided to make the Political Action Committee a permanent part of the organization. The P.A.C., as though to prove the British contention that political action is labour's strongest weapon, has succeeded in achieving a measure of co-operation between local leaders and groups in all the labour camps, including the independent railwaymen's unions. I'd like to see it become a separate political party. It could then practically compel unity in the American labour movement. The 1944 C.I.O. convention, however, has decided Labour's interests can best be served at the moment by using the P.A.C. to back individual candidates, whether Democratic or Republican, who show liberal tendencies.

BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY



DETROIT kept me as busy talking as most American cities I visited; and as if that wasn't enough, the President of the Detroit Taxidriv^{er}s' Association arranged a meeting for me in one of the cinemas at three a.m.—assuring me that was the best time for taxidriv^{er}s, as the night men were then coming off duty and the day men getting ready to go on. To my surprise, quite a crowd turned up; though, as the cinema was on the direct route to the garage and the President and several stewards were out on the street waving empty cabs into the curb, I couldn't ascribe the good attendance entirely to my own attractions.

The Detroit taxidriv^{er}s are unique, I think, in having achieved what almost amounts to a co-operative monopoly of the taxi business in their city. Many of us London taxidriv^{er}s have often wished for it, and we have got so far as starting co-operatives, but they've always remained small compared with the total taxi business in London.

This Detroit organization was not completely co-operative (in the sense that every driver working for it was a shareholder), but it was much nearer to that idea than anything else of its size that I've seen in the taxi business. The vehicles were individually owned. In most cases the driver owned only the cab he drove, but there was nothing to prevent his owning several. A few men owned as many as five or six. But no one was allowed to own cabs within the co-operative unless he was a licensed taxidriver. All the cabs were of the same make, thus making maintenance and replacements cheap and easy, and they were all housed at one large central depot. Here also was the central taxi office, in telephone communication with all taxi ranks in the city, so that all the customer had to do was to ring one central number, where a staff of telephone girls was at his service to find and send him the nearest empty cab. From what I was able to see of it, it seemed as near the ideal taxi system as anyone has yet been able to get—both from the taxidriver's and the customer's point of view.

Incidentally, Detroit, like Washington, is not an easy town for a stranger to find his way about in. The central section is laid out rather like a wheel, with the main streets radiating out like spokes, and the cross-streets making all kinds of awkward angles. During my few days there, I was constantly losing my sense of direction, even in a short walk from the hotel (though, of course, being a London taxidriver, I never sank so low as to ask my way back).

There was the usual first-rate meeting with the local Labour Assembly,

at which I was questioned and cross-questioned to their, and even my, heart's content; followed by the usual continuation over a drink into the early hours of the morning. But for really serious questioning I don't think anything in America beat the dinner given to me by the Editorial staff of the *Detroit News*. There were a dozen of them. They gave me a first-rate dinner and allowed me to eat it in peace and comfort, but once the meal was over there was no time wasted in oratory. They took the speeches as read and got straight down to the afterpiece—question after question, fired at me across the table, on almost every conceivable aspect of British life. What surprised me about it was what a lot I knew—or at least what a lot of British aspects I had strong opinions about. I enjoyed it all right, but by the time we rose to go I was feeling more in need of a stretcher than at any time during the tour.

I was invited by the president of the Detroit Bus and Street-Car Workers to try driving one of their buses—the Detroit Street Railway Company's latest model: a single-decker, built to carry twenty-seven passengers seated and as many more as could be squeezed in standing. It was like an oblong box in shape, with hardly any difference in looks between back and front. The engine, a petrol-driven Ford V.8, was at the back. The driver sat some three feet ahead of the front axle (there was a considerable body overhang, both back and front). His windscreen extended to the full width of the bus. To ensure his clear view there were four large sliding wipers with blades about two feet long; and, on the inside, a rubber-bladed fan to dry off condensation. There were two outside mirrors, off and near; and, inside the bus, a mirror just above the windscreen, to show the driver what the passengers were up to behind him; and another mirror higher up, and over to his right (the driver sits on the left-hand side in America, of course) to show him when the passengers were waiting to get off by the rear door. There were two doors; one for entry, at the front, level with the driver's seat, and one for exit, about threequarters of the way back. Both were automatic sliding doors, controlled by levers near the driver's left hand. On the dashboard was a red light which glowed when a passenger was standing on the rear step. This, of course, was to help quick starting. The moment the last alighting passenger lifted his last foot off the step, down went the driver's foot on the accelerator. There was no conductor.

There was a flat-rate fare of ten cents. As the passengers entered, they dropped their dimes into a box under the driver's eye. He also carried a change machine, slung from his shoulder, consisting of a set of metal tubes which issued the required small change complete on pressing a button. On a ledge at his left, alongside the door levers, was a wad of transfer tickets, covering other routes included in the flat-rate fare; and on his right, hung from a hook on the dashboard, was a ticket punch with which he indicated the transfer passenger's destination. In his spare time he also drove the bus.

There is no doubt in my mind that driving and conducting a bus on a

busy town route is altogether too much for one man. Bus schedules are too tight to allow of fares being taken, change given, and transfers issued, while the bus is at rest. The result, as I saw on one-man buses all over the States, is that the driver starts away immediately the last passenger is on; then tries to steer, change gear, give change, put the dollar bills in his pocket, and issue and punch transfer tickets, at one and the same time. Yet with all the much publicized American road-safety campaigns, I never once came across an instance of any of the safety-orators having the guts to fight the big road transport interests on this issue—though several American busdrivers I spoke to about it confirmed my own impression that it was extremely dangerous.

All I had to do on this occasion, however, was to drive. My passengers were union and company officials. I found the bus much easier to handle than the average English bus of the same size. The steering was as light as that of a baby car, without the baby car's tendency to bounce. The gears were synchro-mesh, and the footbrake, an airbrake, was as light in operation as the accelerator. I once touched it with the tip of my toe (by mistake) and nearly shot myself through the windscreen. The acceleration was all the heart could desire.

Mechanically, these buses are the driver's dream. But the snag of this beautiful tool, under its American method of operation, is that every advantage it offers is pushed to the utmost in the interests of profit making—or what the owners, of course, would call public service. The easy steering and the ultra-rapid starting and stopping, make possible schedules that don't allow a man time to spit. The Detroit busdriver earns every cent of his \$1.20 (approximately $\frac{5}{6}$) an hour. Owing to the wartime shortage of labour, many of these driver-conductors were putting in a hundred hours a week. Detroit is no place for the middle-aged.

13

NEIGHBOURS IN ARMOURDALE



KANSAS CITY, my next stop, was a double-barrelled town. It is all one geographically, but politically it is two, each in a different State: Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas—with separate mayors and city councils, and different laws. Kansas City, Kansas, for instance, is dry, but Kansas City, Missouri, is wet. On my first day there I met city officials from both halves at a lunch in a hotel on the Missouri side; and the men

from the Kansas side were in honour bound to sit teetotal while the rest of us drank. (Besides, you never knew who might be looking). After dark, though, I did find an occasional Kansas side citizen who, once across the imaginary line, was willing to forget. The Missouri side was the posh side where most of the wealthier citizens lived. On the Kansas side were the stockyards, oil refineries and slums.

One of the most interesting men I met there was a police captain (of Kansas City, Kansas). Most of us take it for granted that the effect of police work on a man is to warp his mind so badly that, as we cockneys say, he would hang his own mother. But every now and again you come across a man whose social conscience has been aroused by his police experiences, and who has somehow managed to combine an altruistic urge for the social betterment of his neighbours with his harsh duties as a law-enforcement officer. The amazing thing about such men, in my experience, is their childlike delight in their altruistic hobby; coupled with what often seems to be a blind faith in the capacity of human beings to become angelic. It is, I suppose, the compensation the soul of a decent man demands for the fate that has condemned him to earn his bread as a policeman.

Captain Stanley Beatty, however, was no childlike visionary. He knew what he was at, and he meant business. This is how he wrote, in a subsequent letter to me, of his district, Armourdale, around the Kansas City stockyards: "It is here that our people sweat and struggle and suffer. It is here that the rotting of tenements and shacks embraces the body and spirit of men in the cycle of decay. It is here that men hunger for jobs and the right to life—to lift themselves out of the mire of demoralization which now engulfs them. It is here that disheartened, embittered men, tormented by a death agony, strike at their fellow-beings with the blind fury of prejudice and hatred. Here are to be found our issues and crises revealed in all their ugly nakedness. Here disputes between Capital and Labour are not 'interesting topics' for controversial discussion, but raw, bitter, bloody conflict—the fight for life."

His determination to do something about it instead of merely threatening its victims with the big stick, began soon after he joined the police force. He sat in my hotel room, one afternoon, telling me about it: a thick-set, plumpish man in his early forties, with the open unlined face of one who has never schemed dirty tricks against his fellows.

"It was strikes started me thinking about it," he said. "When I was a young patrolman, I'd go up to the strikers' pickets and say: 'See that line? You cross that line, and I'll boff you.' And they did cross the line, and I boffed 'em. Time and time again it was like that. And it did no good that I could see. And so I got to asking the strikers what the trouble was about, and then I'd see if I couldn't get a word with the employers about it—and in the end it got so that whenever there was a labour dispute, both sides would be calling me in to try and settle it peaceably."

All this, of course, was long before Labour's right to collective bargaining was given legal recognition under the Roosevelt administration.

Beatty took me for a drive round the city. First, we toured the well-to-do residential section in Missouri. It was beautifully laid out. But the modern homes of the rich (the outsides of them, at any rate) are like Hollywood blondes, beautiful but dumb, and apt to be boring in large quantities. I was pleased when we crossed the Kansas River and entered his own domain, among the railroad yards, meat packing plants and oil refineries. As so often in America, it was all very like the pictures—the old silent pictures, before they started building fancy sets in the studios.

We went down to one of the packing plants to pick up Mrs. Beatty who had taken on a wartime job, carving and grading bacon. The early shift was about due to finish. We backed the car on to a narrow bit of waste ground opposite the packing plant, and waited for her.

I sat there and drank it all in. We faced the road. On our right were the railroad tracks, a broad expanse of them, on which cattle trucks were being shunted back and forth and even across the road, after the fashion of American railways. On our left was a wooden frame building, originally painted white, but now grey and flaking under the intense American sun. Immediately in front of us was a typical American "no parking" sign—a portable affair, consisting of a round white plaque on a pole with a weighted base—a sign which a police captain, of course, could safely ignore. Beyond the sign was the wide, dusty, "dirt" road, with a continual procession of cars and huge trucks bumping slowly and dustily over the ridged railroad-crossing in the warm, golden sunshine. Beyond them, on the other side of the road, was a small white-painted shack, covered with enamelled metal advertisements for gasolene, and with a petrol pump in front of it. And beyond the shack again, the huge yellowish grey mass of the meat-packing plant, with a long covered-in wooden trestle trackway running from the roof down across the railroad tracks in a long easy slope until it reached the ground, out of sight, among the thousands of cattle pens on the far side of the tracks. It was a scene so much like the old silent pictures that I could hardly believe it was all true and actual; and that I, even I, was sitting there in the middle of it.

A minute of this, perhaps, and then the wide dirt road was swarming with people, the early shift coming off duty. A minute more, and the swarm was passing across the front of our car, men and women of all types, in all sorts of dress—some dolled up and some in overalls, some clean, some dirty—and showing the outward characteristics of many different nations. Beatty, nodding toward one and another as the swarm swept past, mentioned the various nationalities: Irish, Swedes, Italians, Germans, Russians, Poles, Greeks, Hungarians—it was an internationalist's dream.

After we'd taken Mrs. Beatty home, we returned to the stockyards. Beatty explained that the long, covered-in trackway was the execution path of the cattle, who were driven along it up from the railroad pens to

the roof of the plant, where they were grappled into the machinery and slaughtered. He asked me if I'd like to see the process, but I'd seen all I wanted to see of suffering cattle as a young man, in the old type cattle-boat; and as for killing, I'd once helped to kill a pig whom I'd fed and tended and made a friend of, and I hadn't forgotten the look he gave me in twenty years; so I had no desire to see even the most humane and up-to-date methods of slaughtering. (Illogical and cowardly, I'll admit, for I enjoy eating my four-legged fellow-creatures; and so long as someone else will kill them for me, I shall probably go on enjoying them.)

Beatty, therefore, had to be content with describing the process: how the cattle were grabbed, slaughtered, and slung on to a conveyer belt; their hair going to one department, their skin to another, their blood to another, until the carcasses reached the skilled butchers, each a specialist, who cut his allotted joint from each carcass as it passed him on the belt—fifteen thousand live cattle brought in by railroad, slaughtered, cut up, and shipped out again as joints, sausages, bacon, canned meat and the like, every day.

After some pressing, I admitted to liking a juicy steak, whereupon Beatty enthusiastically led the way into a plant which, he told me, specialized in steaks. There were certainly a lot of steaks inside it; long rooms full of the raw red meat that is carved up into steaks, maturing and "tenderising" under ultra-violet rays before being sent off to Hollywood to sell as Special Kansas City Steaks, at five dollars a pound. But I saw and smelled so much of it in there, particularly smelled it—the sickly odour of those fifteen thousand daily deaths—that I temporarily lost all appetite for steak.

I was taken upstairs to the sausage room, too—a dim, dark-brownish sort of room, wet underfoot with a saline solution which seemed to be in constant flow over everything—and watched girls taking hold of an endless, pinkish, meat-stuffed tube, issuing from a machine, and manipulating it between their fingers into bundles of sausages. All in silence.

Their fingers were deft, but their eyes, considered as young women's eyes, were the dullest I've ever seen. I watched them for some time, admiring the fingerwork, but when I looked into their faces, it was as though they were dully regarding the fingers of someone else; or as though they were dead, and regarding, with the detachment of the dead, the independent antics of live fingers. They were big, broad girls: pale, heavy and greasily meaty. I had a sudden violent desire to get out into the fresh air.

Beatty then drove me around the streets where the workers lived, between the stockyards and the oil refineries. Crude oil comes up from Texas and Oklahoma by pipeline and is here broken down into petrol and the rest; and a lot of it seems to escape into the atmosphere. It doesn't harmonize with the smell of blood and guts from the stockyards. There's something violently antagonistic between smells animal and mineral. If

you work in a stable, you soon grow to like the stable smell; and if you work in a garage, you soon learn to tolerate the garage smell; but you can't step suddenly from one into the other without feeling sick—at least, that's my experience. And here, in these streets of Armourdale, it was as if one were doing that all the time. There was no blended smell, but two separate and clearly defined stinks, each hanging in the atmosphere to enter the nostrils on alternate sniffs, and each made the more nauseous by the foul contrast of its fellow.

As we drove through the streets of old wooden houses, I was not so shocked by the general appearance as I had expected to be, after what Beatty had said about them. This, I think, was because there was so much more open space there than there is in the average English slum. Many of these houses were standing in their own grounds, as it were, and so had countrified aspect. But closer examination showed that they were as rotten and insanitary a set of hovels as many of our own picturesque country cottages. Beatty went on to tell me about the local citizens' organization he had been instrumental in starting: The Armourdale Neighbourhood Council.

The fear that lurks always in the mind of the thoughtful democrat is that democracy will fail of its own inanition; will fail, that is, because so few citizens are actively interested in the machinery of government. The Fascists are speaking no more than the plain truth when they call our present British and American systems plutocracies. And the fault, of course, lies not in our plutocrats, but in ourselves. The needs of industry have compelled us to live in larger and ever larger communities; and the larger the community, the less there is of communal life—the bigger the town, the more isolated the individual.

To quote from Beatty's letter again: "In our modern urban civilization multitudes of our people have been condemned to urban anonymity—to living the kind of life where many of them neither know nor care for their neighbours. They find themselves isolated from the life of their community and their nation, driven by social forces beyond their control into little individual worlds in which they own individual objectives have become paramount to the collective good. Social objectives, social welfare, the good of the nation, the democratic way of life—all these have become nebulous, meaningless, sterile phrases."

It follows that if you are going to make democracy work, the only place to begin is right in your own street. A few months before the blitz on London started I gave a radio talk on the need for street organization, neighbourhood groups and the like, to cope with local disruption and damage that might be caused by air-raids. (Though, as that was before any of it began, I was far from realizing how thoroughly I was hitting the nail on the head.) I know of several groups that were formed in direct response to that broadcast—the only time, incidentally, that I've had direct evidence of a radio talk of mine giving birth to action; an outcome

deeply satisfying to the talker. The question that now confronts the democrat in Britain is whether these neighbourhood groups, shelter committees, workshop committees, and so on, which were organized spontaneously to deal with the day-to-day problems of war, can be kept in being to cope with the more difficult and far less dramatic year-to-year problems of peace. I would say that in towns like London, where the rebuilding alone will take on the character of a battle, the chances are fifty-fifty. The immediate post-war period in these places may be strenuous enough to maintain the wartime sense of comradeship.

In Armourdale the odds against spontaneous organization of this sort must have seemed at least fifty to one—for Beatty and his fellow-reformers were not only up against political cynicism, apathy and ignorance; they were also up against the difficulty of a dozen or more different nationalities, with the differences of language, customs and religion wilfully exacerbated by this or that vested interest.

However, they succeeded to the extent of building up an organization that tackled, and still tackles, the immediate day-to-day problems of the neighbourhood. But an organization which, like this one, insists on being, and indeed makes a virtue of being, "non-political," is, it seems to me, doomed to be powerless in nearly everything that really matters. It can at best only ameliorate effects; it can never get at causes.

The proof of that was before our eyes as we turned into another, and much pleasanter looking street. Here was the same style of old-type wooden house, but instead of being dull, drab, dilapidated grey boxes, they were all brightly painted in different colours. The effect was that of coming out of darkness into light; out of despair into hope. I smiled and Beatty smiled, and I said "I wouldn't mind living in one of these myself."

At which Beatty's smile faded out again. He shook his head. "They're as bad as the rest underneath that new paint—rotten and decayed."

I repeated that they looked nice. And he agreed. The painting, he said, was an important part of the Neighbourhood Council's programme; the idea being that a newly painted house, like a newly cleaned suit, increased a man's self-respect and made him feel he was someone who mattered. Again, one of the district's chief troubles, was the dirty and insanitary condition of both the buildings and the alleys between them. And the Council felt that the inhabitants of a brightly painted house, feeling they had something they could take a pride in, would want to keep it clean—first the house, then the alley, then the street, then the whole neighbourhood.

And, noting the effect of that paint on myself, it seemed to me that a pot of paint, rightly applied, might have more power to turn a lonely, hopeless individual into a progressive community-minded citizen, than a thousand speeches. But there was still the rottenness behind the paint. The pride evoked by the paint, therefore, would turn to disillusionment and despair in the end, unless the rottenness itself was cured.

And there, of course, was the snag. The only body with the power to cure the rottenness, to compel the destruction of these slums and their replacement by houses fit to live in, was the Government—City, State or Federal. And the only way to move governments is by political action; the only constitutional way, at any rate. Yet the Neighbourhood Council was making a virtue of being non-political.

Its resulting powerlessness in this very matter of housing is set out very clearly in the Council's own literature. After asking the question: "Is the Armourdale Neighbourhood Council political?" and replying: "The answer is one big NO!", the pamphlet goes on:

"During its early days, the Armourdale Neighbourhood Council made a survey of the possibilities for a Federal housing project. It was then discovered that the State of Kansas had never passed any of the required enabling legislation. The Council in conjunction with many other groups, backed a bill in the State Legislature for the passage of enabling legislation. The Legislator who sponsored the Bill, in a sudden, unprecedented surprise action, withdrew his own Bill. This action resulted in the defeat of the passage of the needed enabling legislation."

And there, at the time of writing, the matter rests. And there, it seems to me, it will continue to rest, until the Armourdale Neighbourhood Council and all similar organizations including, of course, the trade unions, get together to form their own political party.

But the very word politics so stinks in America by reason of the graft and corruption associated with it, that before the idea can be made attractive to the average citizen, Americans may have to find a new name for it. Any suggestion of politics in connection with a body like the Armourdale Neighbourhood Council at the moment would lay it open to the suspicion of having been bought by one of the local politicians, or of being merely a vote-catching stunt by one of the party "machines."

Although I had read a lot about American politics, I had never been able to get a clear idea of what exactly a political machine was, until it was explained to me by American friends.

There is nothing ethically wrong about the idea of the machine. It can be (and possibly sometimes is) simply a social welfare organization attached to a political party. Each ward in a city or county has its "boss," who gives advice and assistance to the local inhabitants, in return for which he expects them to give their votes to the party he supports. The help given by the ward boss covers almost every problem in the lives of his people, from arranging "relief" for the very poor to helping the better-off in filling up their income tax forms. It also gives money to the local churches and other religious, social and charitable groups. But the trouble begins when its kindness goes further and extends to getting a police summons "fixed" and to finding a job for a friend on the city's payroll; even when the job has to be especially created for him. As the power of the machine grows, the scope of its assistance widens, until in time it may become

powerful enough to fix anything for anybody—at a price. Even to a United States Senatorship.

When the elections come along, the candidate is chosen at a preliminary election within the party. The only people legally permitted to vote at that election are those who have enrolled themselves as members of the party. Any registered voter may so enrol himself, but in practice only a small number do. Few ordinary voters are sufficiently interested in politics, or hold sufficiently strong party views, to register as party members. The result is that although, in theory, any person is free to put up as a candidate; in practice, the choice is dictated by the party machine. But before we begin to sneer at these American methods it is as well to remember that our own parliamentary candidates stand little chance of adoption unless they are approved by their party's central office. In America, of course, the same political machine operates in City government, in State government, and in the Federal government. And the "spoils" system—giving jobs in the government service to party supporters—holds good all through. Our own system of a permanent civil service, and an almost equally permanent system for local government employees, irrespective of their politics, is certainly a great advance on this.

All the same, the marvel is not that politics in the U.S. are such a tangle, but that in this vast tract of land, with a population of 140,000,000 people, drawn from all the countries of the earth, with forty-eight separate and distinct States with their forty-eight separate governments, each government making most of the laws inside its own State—the marvel is that the whole thing functions as well as it does, especially in a "free" capitalist economy. And when the Englishman has finished his criticisms of the graft, corruption, shortsightedness and inefficiencies of the American political system, he still has no adequate reply to the American criticism of European politics; for compared with the shocking mess we've made of Europe, the United Forty-Eight States of America are a model of sanity, brotherhood and righteousness.

And I'm not at all sure that political jiggery pokery—financial wangles, and the "fixing" of things for friends—doesn't go on behind the scenes in Britain to a much greater degree than most of us realize. It is impossible for the ordinary voter to judge. There is a law of libel in this country, let us remember, of which it has been said: "the greater the truth, the greater the libel." That law, it seems to me, must prevent many interesting political details from appearing in our newspapers. The American newspaper is not so heavily handicapped. And since the Democratic paper is ever ready to show up the dirty work of the Republicans, and the Republican that of the Democrats, most of the dirty work in both parties is sooner or later exposed. No American voter can complain at election time that he doesn't know at least the worst about each candidate.

Meanwhile, this is the kind of rallying call the emphatically non-political Armourdale Council sends out: "The Council is a fighting organi-

zation. The Armourdale Neighbourhood Council has enemies and you will always hear talk about it. The Armourdale Neighbourhood Council glories in the kind of people who are its enemies and is glad there is talk against it. The kind of people that are its enemies stand out as one of the strongest arguments for the integrity and the high moral standards of the Armourdale Neighbourhood Council; and as for the talk against it, as long as there is talk, the Armourdale Neighbourhood Council knows that it is still sticking to its original programme and purpose for which it was conceived. Its purpose was to fight, fight for all those things that our people want, and as long as you fight, you will have enemies; and as you fight, there will be talk. When there are no enemies and when there will be no unfavourable criticism against the Armourdale Neighbourhood Council, then the people had better begin to look around to see what is wrong."

Beatty himself was particularly concerned with juvenile delinquency. His own idea for keeping the lively lads of the district in order was to turn them into what he called "junior cops"—to give them an official armlet, and send them out to patrol the streets, doing all the things the kind and helpful policeman should do: seeing old ladies across the road, helping people in trouble, keeping the streets clear and, in some cases, controlling traffic; but, of course, without the power either to "boff" or arrest. He was enthusiastic about the results of this experiment. It seemed to me psychologically sound. It's usually a toss-up with a kid, so far as the glamour goes, between copper and robber. And if you give the average boy the opportunity to dress himself in the copper's glamour, it is likely he'll lose all desire to imitate the robber.

I had several good labour meetings in Kansas City, and the local business men welcomed me with their usual hospitality. I think it must have been somewhere around here that I joined the Missouri and Kansas Horse-Car Excursion, Chowder and Marching Club, for I hold a card signed by both president and secretary, certifying that I am a member in good standing, "and as such entitled to a modicum of special privileges"—though how, when, and where I joined the club, and what it's all about, I can't remember.

The newspaper men did me as proud as ever; though I was a bit taken aback to find the *Kansas City Star* quoting from one of my C.I.O. speeches, in a leader, to prove their Secretary of the Treasury, Morgenthau, wrong about British income tax. It was a mere detail—an explanation of how our income tax affects the lower-paid wage earners. But the leader was a buster. And after quoting me to confute the mighty Mr. Morgenthau, it ended: "We think this testimony of a British busdriver is worth more than all the comparative tables our Treasury experts can submit for the befuddlement of a self-sacrificing people."

Which was all very flattering, but made me feel rather like a civilian screen at the head of advancing troops.

It was at Kansas City I treated myself to a "fruit-plate": a vegetarian lunch. It is a large plate, covered with lettuce leaves, with a small lettuce heart in the centre under a mound of cottage cheese (a crumbly kind of cream cheese) and topped with a maraschino cherry. Around this central mound, as around the hub of a wheel, is sliced fruit; so much of it that each slice stands on its edge: slices of apple, pear, peach, apricot, and so on. It was beautiful to eat, but no delight to a rationed stomach. Or perhaps you have to harden your stomach to it in childhood.

14

COLORADO



FROM Kansas City I made a return visit to Omaha, then went to Denver, Colorado, a mile above sea level, in the Rockies. I had now been in the States nearly three months, and during that time I had seen a tremendous difference take place in civilian life, as the country moved over from comparative peace to full-time war. It was now moving with the rapidly increasing speed of a suddenly accelerated car. In New York, in September, there had been little except the very mild dim-out to make one feel the war at all. But as I got further and further west, and September gave place to October and November, the increasing shortage of civilian goods (though, of course, nothing like as bad as ours), the rationing of gasoline, with its many inconveniences, and the ever-dwindling supply of civilian labour, were beginning to throw normal American life completely out of gear. Things got so bad that, by the time I reached Seattle, on the West Coast, a waitress rebuked me when I asked for a second cup of tea; saying primly: "There's a war on."

I dropped and bent my safety razor in Cleveland, and tried in three towns before I was able to buy a new one. I was fond of "life-savers": small five-cent tubes of peppermints (with which I vainly hoped to space out my cigarettes). In New York and Chicago, the drug store counters had always had a pile of them. But now the sight of a single five-cent package on a drug store counter sent you dashing across the shop for it, in case someone else got there first.

You could no longer rely on the coffee at the railroad lunch counters. Here in America, the home of good coffee, the nauseous stuff they sometimes served would have put even a London coffee stall to shame. On the dining cars, and in the hotels and restaurants, the waiter would hand you

the peacetime menu, offering what must surely be the widest choice of dishes in the world, but when you got down to ordering, you found your choice was restricted to three or four; the rest were "off." But it was the gasoline rationing that hit the traveller hardest, resulting in overcrowded trains and buses, shortage of taxis, and practically no chance of anyone meeting you with a car.

Americans suffered much more from gas rationing than we did, for although they were not rationed so severely as we were, they had much greater distances to travel, and their city public transport was seldom as all-embracing as ours. There had been so little demand for it in peacetime. Many of their residential districts had been laid out on the assumption that every man had his own car. It was not uncommon, I was told, for the car-owning factory worker to drive thirty miles or more to work. What little public transport existed was now hopelessly overworked.

The traveller, of course, noticed the labour shortage most in hotels. And there it wasn't so much the shortage he noticed, as the absence of experienced workers: gone into the army or munition factories, and their places taken by inexperienced and often very young girls—particularly on the elevators. The things an inexperienced girl can do with a high-speed elevator are not pleasant. I had never realized before how difficult it is (on some types of elevators at any rate) to stop at exactly the right spot. We'd all pack in, and away she'd go; due to stop first at the third floor, perhaps. Suddenly, she'd realize we were passing it. On with the brakes! But, alas, too late! We'd be stopped three feet above the floor. Swoop down, then! But, alas, too far! We'd now be three feet below. Swoop up, then!—our stomachs faithfully following after. Maybe we'd hit it just right that time, and maybe not. But we usually made it at the third attempt. So we'd proceed, floor by floor, until, if you were unlucky enough to be going fairly high, you began to feel seasick and to wonder what kind of shock absorbers, if any, were fitted at the bottom of the shaft. And the worst of it was that the girl, having to stand so much more of it than you, would probably feel far more sick than you did, and turn the job in; so that next day you'd have to start all over again with a new girl.

I had left Omaha on the night train and was due at Denver soon after eight next morning, but we were three hours late. It had been snowing during the night, and though the day was sunny, the streets of Denver were wet and mucky with melting snow and ice. After a long wait in the street outside the railroad depot, I squeezed with five others into one of the rare cabs, and got to the hotel.

A very pleasant room had been reserved for me on the third floor, but when I entered it I saw I was walking straight into the morning after. I had grown used, by this time, to taking over rooms uncleaned, but this one was a collector's piece. A taxidriver is experienced enough in the ways of people who feel they can, for the moment, safely strip off their thin veneer of civilization; but I suppose hotel keepers learn a good

deal more. What annoyed me most was the least of it: the dirty towels and empty bottles strewn about the floor, and the male and female cigarette butts, swollen up inside the wet glasses. She must have been very lavish with the lipstick; it seemed to have gotten over everything. It was such a beautiful room, too; nicely proportioned, well furnished, and with that rare quality of artistic unity, a rightness, that made you feel a privileged person to be living in it.

I telephoned about the sad state of the room, but was told nothing could be done about it at the moment, nor was there another available. Expecting to arrive before breakfast, I had put off shaving until I reached the firmer footing of the hotel. Which is a mistake—for me. Even at home, if I put off shaving, there's bound to be the wrong sort of visitors call. And if you put off shaving on a speaking tour, it's odds on you'll be grabbed as you get out of the train and rushed off to meet all the leading citizens. In this case I was luckier. I wasn't meeting any citizens until lunchtime: which gave me nearly an hour. I couldn't fancy that bathroom, but I was able to get very nicely titivated at the barber's; and probably looked all the better, from the American point of view, than if I'd done it English fashion myself. When I returned, late that evening, and another two speeches older, the room was looking as beautiful as it was meant to look.

My evening meeting was with the United Mine Workers, at the little town of Louisville, twenty miles away. As a reader of Upton Sinclair's *King Coal* I had hoped to be able to see a good deal of Colorado miners and mining, but my schedule was too tight to allow of it. I was driven out to the mining town over icy roads after dark, and there was little to be seen except the distant lights from the pitheads. When I arrived, I went straight into the High School building where the meeting was to be held. And when I had finished speaking, there were so many ex-British miners, eager to talk with me about "home," which they hadn't seen, in some cases, for half a lifetime, that I got no opportunity to talk with them about their life in Colorado.

The next day, which was Sunday, I spoke morning and evening at the Grace Community Church—Denver's Labour church. It was in a working-class section of the city and its connection with organized labour dated from the depression, when its preacher, Edgar Wahlburg, newly arrived to take over, and discovering that very few of the local inhabitants were interested in the normal church services, offered them the use of the church buildings for any purpose they felt might be more worthwhile. It thus became both church and community centre—particularly for the labour groups in the locality. And Wahlburg, or "Wally" as everyone called him, became the leader of a strong community effort toward social betterment.

That afternoon he took me on my only American pilgrimage—to the grave of my boyhood hero, Buffalo Bill, on the summit of Look Out

Mountain. Driving up the steep mountain road, the views were splendid, but as the road was covered with hard packed frozen snow, and our back wheels were spinning at each sharp bend, and we were driving on the outside of the road at the edge of a steep drop, I was often far more interested in the skidding wheels than in the view. Wally, however, seemed unconscious of any danger, and was much more interested in finding out what I thought about the chances of a Labour Government in Britain after the war. Like all American liberals he was deeply suspicious of the post-war intentions of the Coalition Government.

On the way back, as we re-entered Denver, some of the other cars were making vicious use of their hooters, and when I told Wally I sometimes drove my cab all day without sounding my hooter once, and that we had a night rule forbidding hooters after eleven-thirty, he was so impressed he decided to preach a sermon about it the very next Sunday. It was odd that a little thing like that should be one of the most impressive things I could tell him about Britain. Yet it does mark the difference between the British and American temperaments.

The C.I.O. were busy trying to organize some of the non-union munition plants in Denver, against strong opposition from the employers, and the local of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers' Union invited me to address a meeting composed mainly of non-union workers in these plants—in the hope, of course, that while telling them something about Britain at war I would also impress upon them the important part trade unions played in British life, both in war and peace.

I was deeply moved by the behaviour of the C.I.O. organizer who took the chair. His job was to get as many of these people as possible into the union, yet he devoted the whole of his short introductory speech to telling them, from his experience as a soldier in the last war and in the International Brigade in Spain, exactly what it felt like to be facing an attack and find your rifle or machine-gun jammed by faulty ammunition; thus impressing on them the need for the utmost care in their work. The effect of this on me was to make me so angry at the attitude of American employers and the American anti-Labour Press toward men of his calibre, that instead of making a hands-across-the-sea speech I got up and gave them a talk on trade unionism—which worked them up to such a pitch that men and women were jumping up all over the hall and shouting out: "I'll join: I don't care if I do get canned!"

I sat down feeling I'd done something really useful. My most cherished American souvenir is the large streamer they had pinned on the wall with "Welcome to Herbert Hodge" on it, and which these workers, after the meeting, covered with autographs for me.

Romance, of course, is where you find it. Some find it battling with stormy seas, some climbing mountains, some in millionaire's mansions and some in a lover's arms. But for me it seemed then in the life of a travelling trade union organizer. I envied those C.I.O. men, travelling the

country in little groups and starting unions wherever they went. Travelling, talking, fighting, organizing. Always entering new territory, always facing the new and unknown power of the local (and usually bitter) opposition, and always moving on again as soon as the organization they had founded was safely on its feet. Always starting something new. That's the life.

15

I AM PRE-FABRICATED



FROM Denver I went to the West coast, taking the northern route up to Seattle and then coming south to Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles. On this trip I had a roomette on the train—a travelling one-room flat. A roomette is available only on the latest type trains. It is the most perfect form of train accommodation I've ever seen. The Pullman built on the roomette system has the same central aisle as the ordinary Pullman, but instead of there being a double row of seats, there is a row of doorways on either side, each doorway opening on a separate roomette. In the daytime, you sit in your own private carriage, looking out on the scenery from your own wide window. At night, or whenever you wish to lie down, all you have to do is to reach up to the wall behind you, pull over a lever, and a bed, ready made with blankets, sheets and pillow, hinges down into position. The bed, when down, completely fills the room. You have to undress, therefore, before you pull the lever. While letting it down you have to take a step back into the corridor. This, of course, means opening your sliding door, but there is no need to make a public show of yourself undressed. On either side of the doorway is a heavy curtain. You draw them together and pull down the zip fastener, and you can then step back into the corridor wrapped in impenetrable curtain, a mere anonymous shape.

The rest of the fittings are much the same as in the bedroom, except that there is a small metal cupboard for your clothes, and more luggage room. The two great advantages of the roomette over the bedroom, are that you lie lengthwise to the train, and therefore in a far better position to take the shocks of stopping and starting, and that, as the bed is made up by the porter while you are at breakfast, it is available at any time of the day you take a fancy to lie down. There is no need to be lonely, either. If you fancy company, there is always the club car and, of course, the dining car. And the wide, deep seat of your roomette is ample enough to

accommodate two friends in comfort, and three at a pinch. It is kingly travel.

Both Seattle and Portland were English in their December weather—alternating between rain and snow. In Portland, the icy slush was ankle deep.

Now that I'd reached the Pacific coast I found everyone completely engrossed in the Japanese war, just as we in Europe are engrossed in the German one. They were not, therefore, as excitable or argumentative about Britain as the Chicagoans. Britain didn't matter much there. But everyone was very friendly, and the business men and the trade unionists deeply interested in manpower problems. I was, therefore, very welcome as a speaker, since that had by now become my main subject. It was an aspect of British organization that I grew more and more proud of the more I saw of conditions in the States. Compared with what we had achieved through our Ministry of Labour, they were still back in the last war. Their production figures were great because they'd got such ample resources in material, machinery and men. But they were far behind us in co-operative effort and government organization. It was like the difference between the man with the big Packard and the man with the Baby Austin. The man with the big Packard could climb the mountain all right no matter what sort of driver he was, but the man with the Baby Austin had got to know how.

Looking back on it now, it seems comical the way I started out determined not to brag about Britain, and feeling there was nothing much to brag about anyway, and yet being compelled, by sheer force of the American contrast, to be constantly hammering home how good we were. Anyone from England who heard me on the Pacific coast must have thought I was Ernie Bevin's personal publicity agent.

I remember, in Hollywood, a man asking me at a private dinner party what was my greatest impression now that I had travelled right across the States, and my replying: "How efficient we are in Britain." Which was a considerable surprise to everyone, including myself—for I had answered with the first thing that came into my head, and had not until then realized how deep that impression had become.

It needed explanation and qualification, of course. Americans are far ahead of us in the technique of mass production, and in their catering to physical comforts. Their inefficiency is chiefly political. It's a spiritual inefficiency; a lack of social conscience, coherence and political gumption. But it is unfair to compare a small island like Britain with a huge tract of land like the United States. As a Detroit business man said to me, after I'd goaded him considerably: "It's so easy for you. You're so small. We could put your whole country into one of our forty-eight States and lose it."

All the same, whatever our political advantages, we are in Britain at least fifty years ahead of the States in social organization; and—solely in the interests of future world co-operation—Americans need to be told

so, again and again and again, until the people as a whole realize it. At the moment, they know only the worst about us—every last jot and tittle of it. And the worst about us makes a pretty black record. Ancient crimes and stupidities that we have long forgotten are still current history in the States. The tale of how the “brutal British redcoats” burned down Washington in 1812 is still on everybody’s lips. (I had never heard of it until I went to America. Now, I shall never be able to forget it; I heard about it so often.) Little Italian children gather round you in Boston harbour, proudly reciting the Ride of Paul Revere. Highly conservative business men (comically enough) talk of “the British” in words and phrases that might have been lifted straight out of a *Daily Worker* anti-Tory article. Minor, and even petty details, admittedly. But when you meet them in their thousands, as I did, floating just under the surface of American good will toward you as a person, you realize how powerful they are in determining the attitude of Americans toward us as a nation.

Of the underlying fundamental goodness of British social achievement, Americans know practically nothing. We’ve got to tell them, and tell them so as they’ll notice it—honestly and forcefully; neither propagandizing on the “everything’s perfect” level, nor going about it on tip-toe in fear of giving offence. You can hit as hard as you like in America. They’ll take it; provided you mean what you say.

In Portland, anything about Ernie Bevin’s achievements went down extremely well, since many people remembered a visit he made there. I had two particularly good meetings—one with the business men, at the City Club, and the other with the Labour Assembly.

My most thrilling memory of Portland is a taxi ride. I arrived early in the morning, just before daybreak, and the taxidriver felt much more certain than I did that there would be no other cars on the streets. We completely ignored cross-roads, blind or otherwise, going over them zip-zip-zip; like that. We reached my hotel in about three minutes and seven zips. My driver proved to be quite correct in his supposition, but I was almost in tears when I got out at the hotel. Leaving Portland, I had a woman taxidriver. She was much more to my taste.

Not that I’m grumbling about American taxidrivers. I rode in cabs in every city I visited and never once got hurt. They know their stuff. It was simply that, in some cases, their taste in driving was not mine. Many of the passengers I’ve driven in a London cab would, I know, love the sensation. The times I’ve been nagged at for slowing up at crossroads: “Go on, man! Go on! What are you waiting for? We’re not going to a funeral.” Such people could have the times of their lives in the States, provided they picked their driver. Ten times the power under the bonnet and a James Cagney at the wheel! Down with the accelerator and to hell with all else!

From Portland, I went south into Californian warmth and sunshine. So much has been written about Californian climate and scenery that

there's no need for me to add my small mite of appreciation here. Besides, they kept me much too busy talking for me to have time to go sight-seeing. What I did see of California, however, mainly from the train window, convinced me that it was one place in the world that fully lived up to its advertisements. It is, I think, safe to believe almost anything anybody tells you about California.

Los Angeles and Hollywood together (they are linked in one town) worked me even harder, if that were possible, than Detroit. I also found the weather just a little too pleasantly warm for hard work. And I was handicapped by an English need for sleep. Everything starts so early in America and finishes so late. In my downtown Los Angeles hotel, no one on my floor ever seemed to sleep.

One day I remember particularly. I had got to bed at about one in the morning, but not to sleep for long, since parties began in the rooms on either side of me at two. I was up at six in order to get myself physically and mentally ready to speak at the Los Angeles Breakfast Club. The proceedings proper didn't begin until eight, but the club premises were some miles away, nearer to Hollywood, and the man who was taking me called soon after seven. We arrived at about seven-thirty. Already there were several cars parked near the door.

The club house was a large wooden structure, standing in its own grounds. Inside the hall, long trestle tables had been set up, running lengthwise with the building, with a head table, set crosswise, on a raised dais at the far end. Although the weather was very warm, by English standards, a huge fire of logs was blazing in an open fireplace near the door, and cups of hot coffee were being served from a counter nearby to the early comers.

I stood sipping coffee and watching the crowd assemble. So great a press of people at that time in the morning was amazing. Before eight o'clock, all the seats were taken and an extra table had to be set up. I was told there were over six hundred present, the élite of Los Angeles and Hollywood. There was another speaker besides myself—Henry Kaiser—which may have had something to do with it.

Many of them, of course, were film people; and when I took my seat at the head table I was a little disconcerted to see, sitting at the end of a table just below me, the terrifying gunman of Graham Greene's *Gun for Hire*, which I had seen a few days before. What disconcerted me was not his being there, but the astounding change in him. In the film, he had been the personification of iron will and cold-blooded ferocity. And there he sat, eating his grapefruit, a medium sized, meek, mild and modest looking man, whom you wouldn't have connected with anything more exciting than a moderately prosperous insurance agency.

One of the most surprising things about the whole affair was that no one looked early-morningish. There wasn't a yawn or a bleary eye to be seen; nor, so far I could see, even a jumped-up-in-a-hurry look about

anyone. Most of the men looked as if they'd spent the previous day in Turkish baths and barber shops, and then bought themselves a completely new outfit of clothes; while the women looked as if they'd come fresh from a week in a beauty parlour. It was a little inhuman.

Sitting next to me was Claire Luce. I knew of her mainly as the author of *The Women*; a play I had admired for its female honesty. She was also (and still is) a Member of the House of Representatives. She looked surprisingly young. Bearing in mind the writer and the politician, I should have expected a woman with neither the time nor the inclination to fuss about her personal appearance. But in that I was being typically English. She'd gone one better than most of even these women. She looked as if she'd been freshly created that morning: self, clothes, hair-do and all, in one unit. It wasn't easy to tell, therefore what kind of woman she was. As with so many American women, I felt that my normal intuitive powers (such as they are) were being baulked by the beauty parlour's armourplate.

But there was nothing armour-plated about the party. While the grapefruit was being served, many of the men sprang up from their seats and did Swedish exercises. After that, one or another would start a song, and all the rest of us would take it up. When we got to one about "Over the Seas to Dover", we all put our arms round the shoulders of our neighbours, and rocked vigorously from side to side. It was certainly not the sort of thing to come to on the morning after. To the English reader it may seem all very childish. But the fact is that although it seems at first a daft thing to be doing, especially at the breakfast table, it gradually takes hold of you until you're rocking and shouting the choruses as loudly as anyone. And you end up feeling very pleased with yourself and everyone around you; and very ready to eat.

Most of us set in seriously to eat after that. But to guard against dullness, various people rose up and sang solos, and others introduced their guests.

Henry Kaiser, whom I got no opportunity to speak to until after the meeting, and then only for half-a-minute, was sitting a little way off on my left. He is a big, burly, middle-aged man; giving an impression of enormous controlled strength—a man who knows exactly how many beans make five but sees no reason to shout the glad news from the house-tops. And not a man you can safely sum up at a glance.

When speech time drew near, the chairman told me there was a radio hook-up. This seemed a bad plan to me. It was giving the speaker two completely different audiences: the singing, rollicking group in the hall and the, presumably, more serious-minded radio listeners at home, in normal nine a.m. moods. One could hardly hope to please both. In any case, I feel a radio hook-up isn't good; you can't make a public speech and have a chat with an unseen listener at one and the same time; but in this case it seemed a worse plan than it usually is. I mentioned something of this to Claire Luce. She took the characteristic American view. The

radio hook-up meant a bigger audience and wider publicity; therefore it was all to the good. As for the tone of the speech, it should obviously be attuned to the bigger audience, the radio one.

Given the fact that the radio audience was there, I felt she was right about the speech—on coldly reasonable grounds. But when I stood up and looked at the rows of expectant faces I couldn't bring myself to take the strictly reasonable view. These people were my hosts. They'd given me a rollicking good time. And I felt the least I could do in return was to give them a rollicking good speech; which the radio listeners could overhear if they pleased. And so I began by admiring their early morning gusto, and taking it on myself to offer them all a job on the five a.m. bus shift. Then went on to describe exactly what it would be like walking or cycling to the garage on that December morning at home—in the blackout, with a nice drop of sleet coming down—and getting the buses out, and rushing the workers to the factories on time. Not too seriously; joking much as we joked about it while on the job; but giving them a pretty good idea of what it felt like. And although there weren't any applications for jobs as bus conductresses afterwards (as there was once from a darling girl in Cleveland after a similar speech) I think they liked it. Claire Luce, who, I had expected, would have pulled it to pieces and found very little of reasonable value in each piece, surprisingly said she could have gone on listening to it for a long time.

When it came to Henry Kaiser's turn, he read, and read well, a carefully written little paper on the need for American business to begin organizing itself right then to tackle post-war world markets. It sounded like the beginning of the next war to me. But that lay more in what I read into his speech than in what he actually said. He didn't commit himself to anything. It was more of a reminder: "Business men! What of the morrow?" Perhaps it was the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, and perhaps it wasn't. I should have liked to have discussed it with him. But there was no opportunity.

When I visited one of his California shipyards I was myself pre-fabricated. I went under the impression that I was to address a meeting of the workers, though it did strike me that three in the afternoon was a strange time for it. When I got there I was taken into a small wooden shack, mounted on piers, just inside the gates, rather like a timekeeper's office, with windows all round so that one could see from it the whole busy traffic of the yard. There, a mike was put on the table before me. I was told to go ahead and record. Each record lasted only fifteen minutes, so I had to plunge straight into an exciting start, from there into a juicy middle, and then hit a good climax dead on the fifteen minute tick. If I over-ran I'd be right off the disc, and if I under-ran I'd be wasting time and material.

It was challenging; especially as I'd come completely unprepared for it, with neither script nor notes. Anyhow, I went ahead, asking the recording engineer to give me the five-minute marks, and the last fraction of a minute,

on his fingers; there being no stopwatch handy. After the first record, I asked how many they wanted, and was told as many as I could make. I'd have liked a week on the job. I'd have scripted them all beforehand and made each a little gem. As it was, I did what I could, and was completely exhausted after an hour of it; the nervous tension was so great. Besides, I'd just done a big meeting at the University of California, nine hundred students, and they'd been such a delightful and responsive audience I'd given them all I'd got. A hurried lunch and a quick rush in a taxi to the shipyard hadn't allowed me sufficient time to recuperate. My nerves were going to pieces by this time, too. It's killing work. And I'd been at it for four months, then.

I think Kaiser's man realized something of that. He waited hopefully, but didn't press me. He was one of the few people who had the good sense not to. When I said no, he took it as final; played the records over to me, and then very kindly drove me back to the hotel. On the way he told me each record would be broadcast to the fifty-three thousand workers on fifty-seven loudspeakers simultaneously; so as to reach every part of the yard and be loud enough to overcome the incidental racket. Which could be a speaker's rhapsody or a speaker's nightmare. With those several records, of course, they could make the speech long or short, according to the time available; dish it out as a serial story, or all in one lump; or put the last first, or the first last—in short, have a mechanical beano with it. Not that it would have made much difference. Each record was completely self-contained, with a wartime personal experience as the core of it. I should have liked to have done a day's work in the yards, and sampled myself on those fifty-seven loudspeakers.

Later, I was told they were so well liked that copies were made for distribution to other towns; so for all I know I may still be heard occasionally on the Pacific coast. Incidentally, I had two good opportunities of sampling myself while in California. My speeches to both the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco and the Town Hall Club of Los Angeles were recorded, and broadcast later, in the evening. They weren't bad as public speeches, but they made poor radio. They were not intimate enough for radio. How the listeners stood forty-five minutes of it I can't imagine. Probably they didn't. I, of course, listened eagerly to every word.

The Los Angeles Breakfast Club speeches came to an end at about ten, and I got back to my hotel about half an hour later. I wrote a couple of letters, and then Montague Love called to drive me out to the Hollywood Authors' Club. The distances in Los Angeles and Hollywood are enormous, the Hollywood Boulevard stretching out for mile after mile, everything being planned on the assumption that everyone owns an automobile and is able to obtain unlimited gasoline. It was the middle of December, and although the weather was like an English June day, except that the sun was brighter and the atmosphere more golden, Hollywood was doing its best to look Christmassy by setting up rows of brightly

coloured Father Christmases, a little over lifesize, on pedestals on either side of the Boulevard—one after another, and one exactly like another, a whole regiment of them.

After lunch and another speech, I was rushed back to Los Angeles just in time to meet a dark and pretty little Russian Jewess who was to drive me to a meeting of the Los Angeles branch of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union—mainly women and mostly immigrants from Central Europe. That speech and the questions and discussion that followed kept me busy until dinnertime. After dinner and some more discussion over drinks in the hotel lounge with the I.L.G. education director and his assistant, I began to feel very tired. But I had a radio talk at ten-thirty that night, and decided I'd better stay awake drinking and chatting than let myself relax before tackling the final job of the day.

My I.L.G. friends stood by me and drove me out to the radio station—more miles. My talk must have been all right, in spite of my tiredness, for the radio man was shaking hands with himself above his head. Then I was driven back to my hotel, and after a farewell drink with my I.L.G. friends, I finally got to bed at one a.m. I sank into a sweet sleep, but promptly at two the usual parties began on either side of me. He: "What about a drink?" She: "No—the smell of the cork makes me sick." He: "Well, let's both smell the cork and both be sick." This on the right. On the left, the scuffling, bangs, bumps, and hearty laughter of a much larger assembly. By the time I'd finished my week in Los Angeles it seemed to me that sleep was the only thing in life worth having.

My most painful memory of Los Angeles is of an open-air war-bond meeting at which a high-pressure salesman introduced me to the audience as "Sir Herbert Hodge, the world-famous British author." And I, not knowing what to do about it and not wanting to make him look silly, finally did nothing about it—with the result that when I'd finished speaking I was handshaken and Sir Herberted by woman after woman who wouldn't let me get a word in edgeways. Which may be very ha-ha to read, but was very sweaty to experience.

My most comical memory is of a man in the crowd who grabbed me after I had finally escaped from the women, and led me off for a drink, telling me on the way how he detested "the British aristocracy"; how democratic he was; how many thousands of dollars he made in a year; and yet again, and nevertheless, and in spite of it, how he mixed on equal terms with men who hadn't got fifty cents.

I had found it necessary to change hotels that day (only a block or two apart) but had been unable to get a cab, or any professional assistance with my bags. They were still at hotel number one. I suggested that here was his chance to put his democratic sentiments to practical use by giving me a hand with those bags.

But he wouldn't. He couldn't. He just couldn't bring himself to be seen carrying a bag. I jeered at him, sneered at him, mocked him; told him

the King of England himself wouldn't be above giving me a hand. And still he wouldn't do it. That a man making all those thousands of dollars a year should be seen helping to carry bags in broad daylight on a main street in Los Angeles, just like a nigger or a chink, was unthinkable. He let me mock and taunt him as I would; huddling up into a ball on his stool and shaking his head like a mechanical toy.

Finally, when I'd used up all the taunts I could think of without repeating myself (and incidentally worked off the irritation and embarrassment of that Sir Herberting) I left him still huddled up and shaking his head, and joyfully carried the bags alone.

I spent Christmas in San Francisco, and celebrated the holiday with forty consecutive hours of sweet sleep. I was lucky in being recommended to the small and quiet Canterbury Hotel, on Sutter Street, which was not only the pleasantest hotel I stayed at during the whole trip (for a person who, like me, needed a quiet life off duty), but was also the cheapest hotel of any I stayed at in the States. Its pleasant atmosphere coloured my whole view of San Francisco. I remember that beautiful city chiefly as a delightful place to rest and relax in.

I visited it twice, first for a whirlwind rush of meetings before going down to Los Angeles, and then for that few days' rest over Christmas, before going up to Canada. It was cooler than Los Angeles; the Christmas weather being like that of an English September: my ideal of weather.

I made a number of friends there, and could have spent my few days' holiday in a riot of parties. The difficulty was to refuse invitations without giving offence. I preferred to rest quietly and read, and wander around the town in the evenings with this or that congenial companion. San Francisco seemed to combine in ideal proportions the cleanliness and vigour of the new with the comfort and mellowness of the old. You could climb the steep Nob Hill in a stubby little cable car and take a drink in the chromium-plated bar on the eighteenth floor of the Mark Hopkins Hotel, with its view out over the bay, or you could go down near the waterfront and find a cosy little place with high-backed wooden pews, rather like those of an old-fashioned London coffee-shop, and let the whole bustling world go by while you discussed the cosmic purpose with a friend.

If ever I win the Irish Sweepstake, or write a best-seller, my first cry will be "San Francisco! Here I come!"

TROUBLE AT PORT ANGELES



I SET off for Canada early in the new year; leaving San Francisco with reluctance. I could hardly hope ever to be in such a congenial city again, nor to know, in such a close and easily getatable circle, so many congenial people. A wire from Ottawa informed me that I was due to speak at Victoria, Vancouver Island, on Monday, January 4th. We worked out trains. It seemed I could leave San Francisco on the Saturday and arrive in Seattle on Sunday evening, and from there take a boat which was due at Victoria early on the Monday morning.

There were two things, however, we forgot to take into account: the weather and the United States Immigration Officials. There was also the minor difficulty of getting a berth to begin with. All my tickets hitherto had been obtained for me by the British Information Services in New York, and the later ones, as trains gradually became more and more crowded, had been stamped "Government service," or some such phrase, indicating a Government priority. But now that my United States tour was ended, I had become an ordinary person, and as such I found it impossible to book a berth to Seattle at short notice. Fortunately, another kind young woman came to the rescue here. She had only been in San Francisco a few weeks, but had already charmed several men, and among them, luckily for me, a railroad man. Through him, she was able to obtain for me a sleeping berth as far as Portland; which assured me of a bed for Saturday night. At Portland, I should have to take my chance of booking a seat to Seattle.

In the morning, I took a last look round the town, and had lunch in a little old bar with one of the aforementioned congenial spirits—which made my leaving seem all the harder. We talked and talked, right through to the last precious half minute. And finally he said, smiling: "I don't think I should feel a stranger in London, now, if ever I went there. I'd just walk down the first intellectual blind alley I came to, knowing I should find myself among friends." And on that thought we parted; he to his radio station to give yet another news commentary, and I to the hotel to collect my bags and go, as I felt, off into exile.

It was a bright and sunny day, with just a touch of exhilaration in the air. It was good to have a last day like that, instead of, as it might have been, heavily raining, yet it made my going seem all the more sad. And if you think I'm sentimentalizing, I can only suppose that you've never known San Francisco.

I said good-bye to my delightful room, and good-bye to the liftman, and good-bye to the reception clerk downstairs, and drove off in a taxi to the ferry that was to take me to the train.

I was still feeling miserable and cheated when I got out of my berth soon after seven the next morning. It was pouring with rain, and there was little to be seen through the misted windows of the train except a blur of dripping trees and wet scrub, a sad and weeping world in complete accord with my mood. We were due in Portland at nine o'clock, so I had breakfasted at eight, and was ready with my bags fastened and hat and coat on some minutes before nine, so as to be early off the train and get a good place in the queue that I felt sure would be forming to book what few seats were left on the day train for Seattle.

But nine o'clock came and there was no sign of Portland. At nine-thirty, I saw the conductor coming through, and he told me we were two hours late, owing to the rough weather. That meant I should probably miss my connection. He said there was another train at four in the afternoon which would still get me to Seattle in time to catch the midnight boat. So I cast care aside and rejoined the smoking club in the men's washroom. Here I learned that there had been continuous heavy rain for several days in this part of the country, flooding the valleys and causing landslides in the mountains. The general opinion was that the conductor was optimistic in suggesting we should be only two hours late.

Lunchtime came, and we were still on our way. We were passing through mountainous country, often with a high wall of rock close against one side of the train, and a steep drop on the other; a country of huge trees, thick scrub, deep valleys, and rushing torrents. Now and again there would be the sight of a snow-covered peak in the distance but, at our level, everything was brownly soft and wet. Coming back to the washroom from the dining car, after lunch, I felt the train come almost to a stop, then slowly, very slowly, begin to move forward again. I looked out of a not-too-steamed-up window and saw a train off the track—or rather the shattered end of a dining car sticking out from underneath a great hill of mud that had slithered down the mountain side. The forward end of the train was completely buried. I was told it had been caught by a landslide on the previous Tuesday night. A mile or so further on, we passed a freight train, similarly derailed and half-buried in mud. Huge as these American trains are, they looked like children's toys against this background of mountains and giant trees. It was a gloomy and fearsome picture. I was glad to turn away from it.

Back in the washroom I found the company had been joined by several U.S. naval men, among them a young lieutenant from a battleship and a stout, middle-aged engineer from a destroyer. They had both, it appeared, been at Pearl Harbour and Guadalcanal.

The lieutenant was complimenting the engineer on the courage of the destroyer crews; telling how he had seen a torpedo coming straight for

his battleship and how a destroyer had deliberately dashed between the battleship and the oncoming torpedo—and was, of course, blown up. The engineer took it all with a grin, saying nothing. The lieutenant asked if it was routine for a destroyer to do that, and the engineer nodded. I butted in to ask what it felt like being in the engine-room of a destroyer, knowing that the captain might deliberately steer into the path of a torpedo at any moment. The engineer asked if I was British, and on my telling him I was, he nodded his head as much as to say he had thought so all along; he had, as it were, smelled it. Whereupon the lieutenant, sensing from the engineer's expression all that he had left unsaid, remarked that for his part he "always stood up for Limeys" no matter what people said about them.

There followed some little talk back and forth about Limeys, for and against, in which neither the engineer nor I took part. The engineer was content to express all he felt on the subject by wrinkling up his lips every few minutes and spitting across the room at the inner rim of the metal spittoon in the opposite corner. The ringing "ting!", as each spit hit, said everything. Sizing him up again I saw that he was Irish; the cut of his jowl proclaimed it; probably American-born Irish at that, and therefore implacable. For him the question was beyond argument. The others, particularly the young naval officers, discussed it warmly, but not hotly; as one might discuss the behaviour of interesting fishes.

The consensus of opinion seemed to be that Limeys meant no harm, and that, like women and children, they were entitled to be saved first—though they had certainly made a nuisance of themselves by getting into trouble in Europe just when America was faced with a real war in the Pacific. I suppose I ought to have stepped in at this point. But I was off duty; tired out with talking; and giving my mouth a rest in the hope that I could work up enough energy to tackle Canada. And it was good to be able to sit and listen for once, without being in duty bound to answer back. Besides, however they looked at it in theory, they were so much more correct in action than we had been in similar case (as, for instance, in that of Czechoslovakia and Spain) that I felt an Englishman had no *locus standi*, as the lawyers say.

All the same, this discussion of Limeys, travelling back and forth over my body, became more and more difficult to bear without blazing up, and I was glad when the conductor came in and changed the subject by informing us that the valley ahead was flooded, and the railroad track "washed out." We were to be diverted on to an old and seldom used track to avoid the flooded area, and that meant not only that we should have to go a longer way round but also that we should have to go very slowly on account of the poor condition of the track. The conductor refused to commit himself about the time we might expect to reach Portland, except to say—what was now extremely obvious—that we should be very late.

It seemed I was going to break my good record and miss a meeting. It was sickening; sickening because I felt it was my own fault. If only I'd followed my rule of always being on the safe side, and started out a day earlier to allow for accidents, I could probably have made it. But for once I'd done what everybody did: relied on the timetable. And this was the result. I might have known it. It was all very well for other people to rely on timetables. They were justified by experience in expecting the little things to fall out right for them. I wasn't. It was only the occasional big things that fell out right for me. Far better than a mere easiness in little things, admittedly. I certainly couldn't grumble. But I was angry with myself that, with all my experience, I had failed for once to guard against the hazards of the little things.

I decided to go back to my Pullman and gloom in solitude. On the way, I looked through a window in the corridor and saw that we were running through flooded fields; then we were crossing a river that had become a wide and swirling torrent, carrying down logs, trees, and all kinds of flotsam and jetsam, including what looked like the remnants of shattered houses. But I was feeling too sick to care about these minor tragedies. Having one's home swept away by floods was a mere accident. Missing that meeting was my own fault.

We finally ran into Portland at six that evening—nine hours late. I still had my two heavy bags, and raincoat and overcoat. I put on the raincoat and parked the bags and the overcoat in the cloakroom. These encumbrances out of the way, I studied the timetables. The next train for Seattle was at eleven-thirty that night, due in Seattle at a quarter to seven in the morning. The day boat left for Victoria at twenty minutes past seven, arriving at a quarter to one. Given a punctual train, a lucky taxi-grab, not too great a distance between station and docks, and then a punctual boat, I might yet arrive in time to speak after the lunch, if not in time to eat the lunch itself. I hastened to join the long queue at the ticket office.

As I made for it, I was conscious of an American officer approaching, at an oblique angle, toward the same spot. But I calculated that, without unseemly scrambling, I should have the place ahead of him in the queue. And had we both been Englishmen there would have been no doubt of it—in that very public place, at least. But this officer was by no means above a scramble. As we converged on the all-important spot he was about a foot to my right and perhaps two feet behind me, while I was about three feet from, and in direct line with, the last person in the queue. Suddenly, and all in one movement, he leapt forward and thrust out his left leg sideways, so that I had to stop abruptly to avoid being tripped; then, smiling back at me over his shoulder, he sidestepped into first place. He was, as I now saw, a major.

There were several things I could have done. I could have called him insulting names, kicked his backside, pulled his nose. I felt like doing all

three. But when the first rush of blood had subsided, it seemed such a petty thing to row about. Besides, I was there on a good-will mission. The least I could do was to bear with the customs of the country.

For, of course, it was the custom of the country. It was the whole American "success" philosophy in little. Get on! Be first! Beat the other man to it! And success will justify the means—any means. The wonder was, taking that philosophy into account, not that such things should happen, but that there was any queue at all, and not simply a savage scramble around the ticket window.

Admittedly, the same kind of thing happens often enough in England; though seldom quite so crudely. But it isn't the custom of the country; it doesn't spring from the Englishman's philosophy. The Englishman, when he does it, stoops to it. He does it shamefacedly, with a consciousness of wrongdoing, and in the hope that no one has noticed it.

The American, on the other hand, does it proudly, with a smile of triumph. He doesn't feel he has committed a breach of good manners. On the contrary, he feels he has asserted his manhood, and even created a favourable impression on the person he has outsmarted. He feels the Englishman who refuses to applaud is a hypocrite. He feels sure the Englishman would do the same thing in the same way, if only he were smart enough to see the opportunity. Why therefore pretend to condemn it when done by others?

It is the conviction of sin that marks the difference between the English and the American outlook. It was all expressed in that smile.

These and other not quite such scientific thoughts brought me step by step to the ticket window. The major asked for a berth to Seattle, and got it. Then I asked for one, and didn't. It seemed the major had got the last. He was not only entitled to smile, he was entitled to laugh out loud.

I explained to the clerk the importance of my catching the Victoria boat. He was a friendly chap, and anxious to help me if he could. He did some telephoning, and then asked me if I minded how much I paid. I, of course, said no. Anything to save missing that meeting. In that case, he said, he might be able to find me something before the train was due out. He advised me to hang around the station and look in on him from time to time.

It was now after eight, and I hadn't eaten since noon. The diner on the train had run out of food and drink. They'd naturally made no provision for being nine hours late. I went out into the town in search of a drink but, perhaps because it was Sunday, most places were shut. I couldn't get any whisky, but I did manage to find a little place where I got a glass of very gassy beer. Then I returned to the station and visited my clerk, but was still unlucky. I decided to wire Victoria, informing them that I should probably be late. Unfortunately, the original Ottawa wire to me had contained no clear address, so I addressed this wire to the C.P.R. hotel in Victoria and hoped the hotel people would see to the rest. Then

I went out again in search of a meal. I don't remember why I didn't eat in the station. The buffet must have been either closed or overflowing with people; the other parts of the station were crowded, I remember that. I walked a little further afield this time, but there seemed to be no restaurants open. Finally I saw a lighted drug store, and decided to make do with a sandwich, but was delighted to find roast lamb on the menu. The lamb turned out to be fossilized rather than roasted—probably cooked several times before in vain, only to be cooked up all over again for me. However, it was something solid to put into my stomach. And perhaps I was getting finicky after four months of American plenty.

As I re-entered the station, the ticket clerk called out to me, and on my going over to the window he informed me that he could let me have a whole bedroom to myself. For once life had behaved exactly as in the moral tales my mother used to tell me. This was the reward of behaving like a little gentleman. I walked off with the ticket feeling extremely pleased with myself. All I needed now was a little whisky.

And even that turned up in the end. After getting my bags, I had a long and weary wait at the barrier, long enough for all pleasure to evaporate and for melancholy to descend again. The train was obviously going to be late in starting and so could hardly help but be late in arriving—even if all went well on the way. And after these four months of continual travel I had gotten very, very weary of waiting at barriers for trains that were late. So, apparently, had most of my fellow-passengers, for as the crowd grew larger and the waiting longer, the ticket inspector at the closed barrier was subjected to a steady stream of sarcasm. The surprising thing was that he bore it patiently, almost like an Englishman, saying nothing.

At last, long after the train was due to start, we were admitted to the wet darkness of the railroad track, and I was thankful to find my numbered car and clamber up into the lighted warmth within. Passing along the corridor of the bedroom section, I saw through an open door a man I had spoken with on the Portland train. He was bending over a bag and pulling out a large bottle.

He looked up and saw me. The result, in the States, was a foregone conclusion. I hurriedly dumped my bags in my room and immediately foregathered, bringing the icewater glass from my bedroom cupboard. When I got into bed an hour or so later I was convinced that everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

I arose very early the next morning, determined to leave nothing to chance. But the train ran into Seattle fifty minutes late, so the only difference my getting up early made was that I had to wait longer for breakfast. (As the train was due in before the normal breakfast time, no breakfast was served on board.) Arriving so late, of course, I had missed the boat. I decided to park my bags at the station, get some breakfast, and then go to the British Consulate, which by that time should be open, and get them

to telephone Victoria and explain that my meeting for that day would have to be cancelled. It was still raining, and it was all still my fault, but after I'd got a glass of orange juice down, and followed it with cornflakes and cream, bacon, eggs, and coffee, I was at least prepared to let myself off, provided I never allowed it to happen again.

The man in charge of the appropriate department at the Consulate promised to square things at Victoria for me; and so there was nothing else to do except wait for the midnight boat. There was no sense in walking the wet streets all day, so I decided to get my bags to the wharf in readiness (for with taxis so scarce, I couldn't be sure of getting one late at night) and then take a room at a hotel and clear up some of my constant arrears of correspondence. I told the man at the Consulate I should be at the Olympic, in case he should want to get in touch with me, and went off looking forward to a carefree day.

I parked the bags at the wharf without any difficulty, and went on to the Olympic. The procedure seemed to be as usual. I asked for a room for the day, filled in a registration form, the girl clerk made out the usual slip, took down a key as usual, called a bell boy as usual, handed him the slip and key, and I turned to follow him to my room. But the bell boy glanced down at the floor roundabout, then looked up at me, and said: "Where's your grips?"

I smiled, feeling rather clever at having got rid of the damned things. "At the wharf," I said.

Whereupon he turned and flung the key back on the counter. "No baggage," he said to the girl.

The girl looked at me as though I'd tried to rob the till. "No baggage, no room," she said.

I resented the sudden change in manner rather than the words; the immediate switch of both from common courtesy to downright rudeness. If it hadn't been that I had given the Consulate the Olympic as the place to find me, and didn't relish the prospect of more rearrangement and more telephoning, and a trapse around in the rain to find another hotel, I'd have told them what to do with their room. But continual platform performances had left me only half alive. I was willing to do anything anybody said for the sake of peace. So I pulled out a wad of notes and asked how much.

The money settled it. But for some curious reason, she took it grudgingly. And both she and the bell boy continued to regard me with suspicion. It's very queer this. Apparently you can enter a hotel carrying a suitcase, containing, for all they know, a bundle of old newspapers and a couple of bricks, and you will be received with obsequious politeness and granted unlimited credit. But enter with a pocketful of money and no suitcase, and you're treated as a rogue and vagabond. Hotel keepers must be extraordinarily easy meat for the genuine rogue.

But the worst was to come. Some hours later, having written the more

urgent of the overdue letters, and feeling sleepy, I took off my clothes and got between the sheets. Then I thought I'd ring the Consulate in case there were any further hitches, and so save their disturbing me during the next hour or two. I picked up the telephone and asked for the Consulate's number. A voice asked: "Have you paid for your room in advance?" And I said: "Yes. Of course I've paid for it. And I've got a receipt, too." And then I repeated the number I wanted. And the voice said: "If you've paid for your room in advance, you can't make telephone calls." "But," I said, "I must make a call. It's important."

"Then you must come down to the lobby and use the public call box."

"But I'm undressed," I said. "Surely you can trust me for five cents. You trusted me for fifty dollars when I was here a month ago, and all because I'd got a couple of suitcases."

"If you've paid for your room in advance you can't make a call," repeated the voice implacably.

Whereupon I lost my temper and said Jesus Christ and other things to the same effect, and when I paused to say hello again, found the telephone was dead. So I decided to hell with it, and tried to get some sleep, feeling confident the Consulate would call me if they wanted me.

But I was now too jangled to sleep, so lay on the bed and read myself back into a good humour with Damon Runyon.

I was due to vacate the room at eight o'clock under the contract, and carefully stayed until the tick of eight to get my money's worth; though I started to feel hungry long before that. I was determined they shouldn't have a cent out of me for food. But when I got downstairs I saw the rain was still teeming down. So I ate in the hotel restaurant, after all. At ten o'clock it cleared up a little, and I strolled leisurely across the town and down to the wharf, arriving there about quarter to eleven. When I went to buy my ticket, the clerk asked me if my name was Hodge, and on my admitting it, gave me a slip of paper on which was written a telephone number and request to call it. I did so, and discovered it was the home number of the man at the Consulate.

"I'm afraid you may be going to have some trouble," he said. "I've been trying to get in touch with you all day. Where have you been?"

I told him.

"But they told me at the Olympic you weren't there. I've called them again and again."

So apparently it was forbidden even to receive an incoming call if you had paid for your room in advance.

"Well," he said, "it's too late to do anything about it now, but they've been turning a lot of our seamen back at the United States border, and I'm rather afraid they may turn you back too. Have you got a permit to leave the country?"

"Why no," I said. "Only my passport. They told me that was all right in San Francisco."

"I know," he said. "But San Francisco is a big town. Port Angeles, your last port of call in the States, is only a wharf and a couple of streets. They don't see things in quite the same light there. But there's nothing we can do about it at this time of night. If you do get turned back, call us, and we'll see what we can do with the U.S. officials here."

And at that we had to leave it. For my part, I no longer cared. If it meant cancelling more meetings, then they'd have to be cancelled. I'd worried so much already over missing the first one that I hadn't the capacity to worry any more. There was nothing I could do about it, anyway. I went aboard the boat, found my cabin, got into bed and went to sleep.

The next thing I was aware of was someone banging on the cabin door. It sounded as though whoever was banging had been banging for some time and was getting impatient, for a loud voice was calling: "Open up! Open up!" with a power and urgency that increased with each repetition. It sounded to me very much like The Law. And when I had woken up sufficiently to get out of bed and admit it, I discovered it was—in the persons of the United States Immigration and Customs Officers. We had reached Port Angeles.

My bags were all right, but the Immigration Officer wasn't at all satisfied with the reasons I gave for wishing to leave the States. Before he could allow me to leave, he said, he had to be satisfied of three things: (a) that I wasn't trying to get out of the country in order to avoid paying income tax, (b) that I wasn't doing it to evade service in the United States Forces, and (c) that I wasn't on my way to give information to the enemy.

I suggested that before he could hold me, he would need strong reason to suspect that I was guilty of any or all of these crimes. No, he said. On the contrary. The onus was on me to prove to his satisfaction that I didn't contemplate committing them. I pointed out that I'd got a good wad of official correspondence to show who I was, and why I was travelling, besides my British passport, identity card, alien's registration certificate and the rest.

At which, he pulled out his own wad of papers, mostly typewritten, sat down, and began to thumb them over. A minute or two later, perhaps feeling my gaze, he looked up and said: "I'm trying to find a loophole for you."

I sat on the bed and waited. He went carefully through his wad, page by page, until he came to the end, then shook his head. "No. There's no loophole," he said. And then, rising, and becoming brusquely official again: "You've got just ten minutes to get dressed and get off the boat. I'll be waiting for you on the wharf." And he walked out.

I looked at my watch. It was already six-thirty. I had thought it was the middle of the night.

I began to dress, and was delighted when an agitated ship's officer poked his head round the door and informed me that I was holding up the

departure of the ship. Despite the anxiety of both the Law and the ship's company to set me ashore, no one offered to give me a hand with my bags. So I picked up one bag and explained to the ship's officer that I would return for the other in due course. I then made my way out along the deck and down the dimly lit gang plank. Nor was I altogether surprised when I reached the wharf to hear my second bag landing with a little slap alongside me.

In the little wooden office of the shipping company, the Immigration Officer was waiting.

"I hope," he said as, staggering a little under the weight of my bags, I followed him out into the pitchy darkness of the roadway—"I hope you don't think I like getting up early in the morning to make trouble for people."

What I thought seemed to have no bearing on the issue; so I said nothing. With all his sympathy he made no offer to help with the bags. I asked him where I could find a telephone.

He said nothing could be done at that early hour. I said I thought a great deal could and would be done, once I made contact with the British Consulate in Seattle.

Well, he said, there was no hurry. There wasn't another boat until the next day. Besides, I'd need a government permit before I could go. That would have to be obtained from Washington, and would take at least ten days. In the meantime, his office opened at nine o'clock, and if I cared to I could come round and talk it over.

With that, he quickened his pace and left me. I set down my bags and tried to get some idea of my bearings, but it was too dark to see more than the vague blur of what seemed to be a warehouse on my right. There was no sidewalk that I could feel, only a rutted dirt road. I could still see the lighted doorway of the shipping company's little shack behind me, so I went back there, and dumped the bags in a corner, with my heavy coat on top. If anyone took a fancy to them they could have them. I was fed to the teeth with lugging them about. And all for the sake of having my books with me, and making a respectable appearance at meetings! It was ridiculous. Once again I realized how much more sensible I'd been when young, travelling as a hobo, with no more luggage than I could conveniently cram into a haversack.

I returned along the dirt road until I struck what appeared to be the main street, crossing it at right angles. There I saw the crimson Neon sign of an all-night café. Following my usual practice in times of crisis, I went in and ate. By the time I had finished, it was growing daylight, and I was able to take stock of the town.

There appeared to be only two short streets, but these looked in every way as modern as the shopping centre of a large city—except that there were no buses or streetcars. I found a hotel, engaged a room, and telephoned Seattle. The response was not so much "we told you so" as "we

feared so." They promised to get in touch with the Seattle Immigration Office and to inform Victoria of this additional delay.

The hotel in which I was staying was a small place of only three floors. It served no meals, and appeared to have a staff of only two: the good lady who received the guests and operated the lift (an old-fashioned affair worked by a rope) and a lad of about fifteen who occasionally relieved her, and looked as if he might be her son. Yet the accommodation was as good, in essentials, as that of a New York or Chicago giant; even down to, or up to, the private bathroom attached to each bedroom.

After making use of it, I went round to see the Immigration Officer, just to pass the time. I found him in his shirtsleeves, sitting at a table piled with open books and stacks of typewritten sheets.

"I'm still looking for a loophole for you," he said, "but I can't find one."

And he began to read out the relevant passages from this regulation and that, picking up book after book and document after document. The purport of all was "No." It was surprising what a lot of laws there seemed to be to prevent people from leaving the States. This was indeed hospitality. And for my part, given the wherewithal to eat, drink and sleep, I should have been very happy to stay, if only I hadn't been under orders for Canada.

His reading was interrupted by the telephone bell. I judged from his end of the conversation that it was the U.S. Immigration Office in Seattle. He explained at some length his search for a loophole and his failure to find one; then listened in his turn to what Seattle had to say. Finally he hung up, turned to me and said: "Well, it's all right with us, but you ought to have something to show you're exempted from service in the United States Army. Your address is New York, so you ought to go back there and register with the New York draft board."

I reminded him that now I'd engaged a hotel room in Port Angeles, I'd got an address right there. Surely I was now entitled to apply to the Port Angeles draft board?

But no government enactment, he seemed to feel, could possibly be tackled as straightforwardly as that. All laws in his view appeared to be gigantic blind bastions in which one vainly searched for loopholes. However, he picked up the telephone, called the local draft board, and told them our doubts and difficulties—or rather his doubts and my difficulties. Whatever answer he got seemed in no way to ease his doubts, but he said they were willing to see me if I'd go along.

The office was at the other end of the town, about four minutes' walk, a small room on the second floor. There I found my perpetual American saviour in the person of another kindly young woman.

"I've come for an alien's exemption," I said.

Womanlike, she went straight to the point. She waved a hand toward the shelves that covered the walls, stacked with thousands of forms. "I expect we've got one here, somewhere," she said. "But we've never had a

case quite like yours before. Let's look." And she lifted up the counter flap and invited me in.

We went through the many varieties, trying stack after stack until one caught my eye containing the words: "Exemption" and "Alien."

"That's it," I said; and she read it and agreed that it obviously was. So we filled it up and she signed it and I signed it, and then she made out the little card that went with it, for me to carry as proof. I thanked her and went to test it on the Immigration man.

He was charmed. He read it through and smiled all over his face. "Show that to me to-morrow," he said (for this interview was evidently strictly unofficial and off the record). "Show that to me to-morrow, on the wharf, and I'll put you straight aboard the boat." And we shook hands on it.

When I came to read it over afterwards I realized it should have charmed anyone in his position, for it was strong medicine. It declared (a little alarmingly at first sight) that my "application had . . . resulted in a determination" that I "was not a male person residing in the United States"; at least, not within the meaning of the Selective Service Act.

Now completely carefree, I spent the rest of the afternoon with a little old man, a crippled ex-cowboy, whom I had stopped to ask the way to the local cinema, and who, when he discovered I was a visitor from a far country, insisted on taking me into the saloon outside which we happened to be standing and buying me a drink. There was a half-and-half Prohibition law in force thereabouts, as in Seattle, which, while it did not completely forbid drinking, resulted in there being nothing fit to drink. My companion warned me off the beer, and recommended the brightly coloured liquids displayed in the bottles on the shelves.

He bought me a glass of the brown, and then I bought him one of the green; and then we went on to try the red and the purple. He said it was wine. It tasted to me more like diluted sweet syrup—with far less good cheer in the whole lot of it than in one glass of coca-cola. However, he seemed to think highly of it, and I thought highly of him, so it was pleasant to sit and sip.

His talk was all of horses, particularly of those he'd bred and broken-in. I can't remember much of it now. I was more taken with his kindly ways, and the play of his features as he sat there living his youth again. (He reminded me very much both in size and manner, of James Stephens, who himself, sitting on his small three-legged stool in his garden, speaking poetry, makes me believe in leprechauns.)

I hoped he would spend the evening with me, but on my suggesting it, his brightness immediately fell away. He shook his head, asked the time, and then said he must go. I gathered he lived with an elderly female relation whose rule was strict. It occurs to me now that he'd probably been sent on an errand, and our meeting had been the cause of his falling by the way, for he limped off down the street with the expression of a

boy about to face his elders after playing hookey. I hope he hadn't spent any of the shopping money.

Early next morning, on the wharf, the Immigration Officer formally inspected my papers once again, then a Customs man reinspected the contents of my bags, and I was given permission to board the boat.

The tiny wooden shipping office was crowded. As I staggered past with my bags, one of the officials was saying to a very pretty girl who was with a U.S. army captain: "But what *proof* have you got that you're his wife?"

She had all my sympathy, but I felt it would be more tactful to hurry by apparently unhearing than to stop and offer it. I did not see either of them, later, on the ship.

It hardly seemed worthwhile to demand the return of my cabin for the three-hour remainder of the journey, so I strolled the deck and watched the sun rise, and looked out on the great expanse of the Pacific, wishing I were on my way to Australia instead of only to Vancouver Island.

17

EDWARD AND ELGAR



WE arrived at Victoria at half-past nine and the Canadian Immigration Officer made no difficulty about letting me in; he welcomed me in.

At the palatial Empress Hotel, there was a pile of letters waiting for me, one of which contained the first half of my Canadian schedule. There was also the president of the local Canadian Club. He told me he had been able to cancel the first meeting without inconveniencing anyone, but that both audiences had turned up the next day for the second meeting, only to be disappointed. He was, naturally, put out about it, but there was nothing either of us could have done or could do then. We hailed and farewelled sadly, and I gladly escaped to my room.

At the door I found a reporter waiting. He accompanied me inside, wanting to know the details. He was a friendly chap, but determined to get a story, and get it there and then. I told him briefly what had happened while I glanced through my letters.

The Canadian schedule looked even more closely packed than the United States one; it seemed to be talk and train, talk and train, right across the country. It ended, for the moment, at Toronto, but the accompanying letter promised more to follow, covering the trip from Toronto to Quebec.

The C.P.R., it said, was delivering to the hotel my train and bus tickets for this first part of the journey.

I went over the pile of letters again. There were no tickets. I called the hotel desk. No—none had been delivered. Then I looked again at the first page of the schedule, and saw that I was due to catch the ten a.m. train out of Victoria that very day. Which was manifestly impossible; it was ten o'clock already.

Yet I hated to have to disappoint still another group. I hesitated between sending a wire to cancel that day's meeting (an afternoon one) while there was still time, or getting on to the local C.P.R. office and finding out if I could obtain my batch of tickets, take a later train, and still arrive in time to speak. I also felt I needed some breakfast.

Meanwhile, the reporter, sticking doggedly to his job, was still asking questions, which I was answering or ignoring according to whether they hit a crevice between my own preoccupations.

I called the C.P.R., but the line was busy; so got out a telegraph blank and began to draft a wire.

The reporter had now started on the story of my life. I tried the C.P.R. again and got through. While they were connecting me with the man I wanted, the reporter was saying: "You've written some books, haven't you?"

I nodded.

"What are the titles?"

"But does it matter?" I said.

"Oh give me just one," he pleaded.

"*It's Draughty in Front*," I said. Then I got on to the man who was looking after my tickets. It seemed they weren't ready yet. There were so many of them—

"*Draughty on the Back Seat*?" asked the reporter, laughing. I shook my head. "In front."

— and in any case I'd have to come to the office personally in order to check over the schedule with him, and —

"— what message have you brought from the British people?"

— give him a receipt. It was an extremely complicated journey and would need careful working out. Could I come and see him to-morrow?

"But I was due out of here according to the schedule at ten o'clock this morning. I've already missed two meetings—"

"Just a short message," pleaded the reporter. "Surely you've brought a message of some kind."

"— I've got to have them this morning. And can I possibly get a train to Duncan this afternoon?"

"One people speaking to another . . ."

Finally, the C.P.R. man said he'd try to have the tickets ready at eleven-thirty; and no, I couldn't get another train that day.

I called the hotel desk about the wire and they suggested it would be

quicker to telephone. I did, and was lucky enough to get on to the woman secretary at once. She said she'd try to arrange alternative transport and would call me back.

That settled, the weakest part of me began to give way. "Now look," I said to the reporter. "I'm sorry, but I really must."

"That's okay," said the reporter. "You go right ahead. You can go on giving me your message."

But I was no eighteenth-century monarch; my puritanical bowels tightened in horror; with the result that I was able to give him a short message before retiring.

I had breakfast downstairs in the huge dining-room, and not the least of it was a pot of real tea. For an Englishman, the C.P.R. hotels are the last word in comfort; for they combine the modern conveniences of the United States hotel system with the personal warmth of English service, and a combination of American and English dishes. I could write a panegyric on C.P.R. hotels.

As one without strong feelings for or against our monarchic survivals I found the psychological atmosphere of the Empress pleasantly quaint, for it took its name seriously. It was named, of course, after Queen Victoria, Empress of India. In the ordinary American and Canadian hotels, the servants will be friendly if they like you, and strictly professional if they don't; and your equals in any case. But at the Empress, they behaved like old family retainers. You were the squire; the hotel the old family mansion, and the grounds the estate. It was pleasant if you could believe in it.

At first I thought it was a Hollywood Victorianism; a synthetic atmosphere as scientifically planned as the air-conditioning plant (probably by an American) to attract the American tourist. But I found later that it wasn't confined to the hotel. It was spread in thick and thin patches all over Vancouver Island. And there it was undoubtedly genuine. It was like living in a perpetual Edwardian Empire Day, where the Union Jack was for ever braving the battle and the breeze, and a Heavenly orchestra playing Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance*. It was what Americans would call, tolerantly and even respectfully: "very British"; and many Canadians, bitterly and not in the least respectfully: "very English."

This atmosphere, which could be pleasantly quaint in a hotel, was, of course, appalling as the spiritual atmosphere of a community. And its effect on me was that I got off in Canada on the wrong foot. I didn't realize then that it was only one of the many strands that go to make up the Canadian outlook.

But I had all this still to learn. I came away from breakfast full of good English tea, and feeling pleasantly mellow because of it. In the lounge, another kind woman was waiting for me—this time to put me safely on a bus to Duncan, and so make that afternoon meeting possible.

Before catching the bus I was able to collect my tickets from the C.P.R.,

a thick wad which was clipped into a folder to make a book, and covered the journeys around Vancouver Island, then by boat to the mainland, and then by train and bus again, over a route taking in Vancouver, Penticton, Trail and Rossland, Kamloops, Revelstoke, Banff, Calgary, Edmonton, North Battleford, Saskatoon, Biggar, Prince Albert, Regina, Moosejaw, Medicine Hat, Brandon, Fort William, Sudbury, North Bay, and Toronto. There was, of course, much more to come; but I felt that was quite enough to be getting on with. The delight of travelling for travelling's sake had by this time worn off.

At Duncan I had my first experience of the Canadian small town hotel—or what we would call village inn. It was a two-storey, wooden building, with the bedrooms upstairs, leading off from a central gallery. As in many other small Canadian hotels, the visitor was shown up to his room but was expected to carry up his own baggage. This may have been due to the wartime lack of "hired help," so that the proprietor himself was compelled to do the guiding. And as these proprietors were, as a rule, men of majesty, obviously carrying considerable spiritual as well as physical weight, I suppose helping with the baggage was beneath them. I got in wrong with this man from the start. U.S. hotels had spoiled me. As he threw open the door of my room, I took one glance round and exclaimed: "What! No bath?"

His look of contempt would have done credit to the keeper of an English inn. I was immediately conscious of my stupidity, but didn't feel like spoiling the effect by apologizing. The exclamation had come so naturally; that was the amazing thing. Here was I, who had lived without a bathroom for nearly thirty-six years out of my forty-two, suddenly shocked that I should be offered a hotel bedroom without one. So easily does the human mind adapt itself to luxuries.

There was a bath, of course, and a w.c., shared, English fashion, by the whole floor. But no meals were served. All one's eating had to be done off the premises. This also, I discovered, was usual in Canadian small-town hotels, though in most cases I believe it was due solely to wartime difficulties; lack of help being the chief. Nor was there always a restaurant very near a hotel. I found it a great nuisance; especially when the temperature got into the minus thirties. It meant that I'd have to dress up to face the weather even to get a cup of tea.

However, all this was to come. On Vancouver Island, the weather was as English as the Empress Hotel, and so was much of the scenery. I spent a week on the island, travelling all round it—literally round it, for though the coastline is well populated, with almost every town and hamlet linked by the circle of railroad, the interior is still dense forest. Once you get a few miles inland it is unwise to travel without a compass. The chief industry seems to be cutting down this forest, sawing up the lumber and exporting it. In the summer, the island does a big tourist trade. It's an American Isle of Wight—with the excitement of exploring the virgin interior thrown in.

My meetings were sober affairs, after those in the States. It may have been simply that the very Englishness of the islanders prevented their letting themselves go as the American audiences did, but I couldn't help feeling that if only I'd been, say, second cousin to a carriage-washer in the Royal Mews, and so primed with Palace gossip, I'd have got along far better.

But these Edwardian "County" airs that I sensed in my audiences were not, I felt, due so much to snobbery as to a peculiar form of homesickness. So many of the people I met were middle-classish sort of people who had left England either before or immediately after the first world war, and their mental picture of England, therefore, was pre-1914. The intervening years had fairified it, made it with each passing decade more and more Ruritanian; until Britain had become a country of noble Lords and gracious Ladies, supported by a loyal and humble tenantry—with, here and there, the festering black spot of an industrial town, where warty and unshaven trade unionists, dressed in chokers and corduroys, furtively plotted revolution. (In vain, of course; for if the worst came to the worst, there was always the Household Cavalry.)

Life on Vancouver Island, by contrast, was real and arduous. Many of these people had come to it as pioneers, having to carve out a clearing in the forest and make a home from the sawn-up trees before they could lie down to sleep between four walls. And for me to be outright and downright in denouncing or ridiculing their dream of England now that they were old, was, I felt, to be wickedly cruel. It was like snatching the hope of immortal life from a dying man. If they had been younger, the case would have been altogether different. But the younger ones seemed to be either away in the Forces, or in the war factories on the mainland. Most of the people I spoke to were too old and set in their ideas to be capable of new vision. The most I could hope to do was to give them a gently drawn picture of the Britain of to-day, and to persuade them, in my own person, that socialist ideas could be held by normal human beings. But I don't think I succeeded even in that. Perhaps I wasn't gentle enough—or perhaps I was too gentle. I don't know. All I could be sure of was that their minds and mine were not making contact. We neither fused nor sparked.

All this, of course, applies only to the people I met. How far it applied to the people of the island as a whole I had no opportunity of judging. Right across Canada, my meetings were confined, with only two exceptions, to members of the Canadian Clubs; and in many places, including Vancouver Island, it seemed to me that the Canadian Clubs were the equivalent of our Conservative Clubs. On the Island, I managed to get only one intimate talk with anyone outside this group; an elderly porter at one of the hotels. He had been a tram conductor in Glasgow, and certainly knew what was what. But I got no opportunity of finding out how far he was representative of the majority of the islanders.

Apart from the anti-climax of the meetings—which is to say somewhere in the background of my consciousness—I enjoyed my week there. The scenery was magnificent, and the quiet peacefulness of the coastal countryside a welcome relaxation after those hectic months in the States.

18

BRITISH COLUMBIA



I **CROSSED** to Vancouver feeling much better in health because of it, but longing to meet a few congenial spirits. There was, of course, the luxury of the C.P.R. Vancouver Hotel to begin with—a luxury to be snuggled down to and wallowed in. It was like stepping from log cabin to White House in one jump. There was a pile of letters waiting for me, and I ordered dinner in my room so that I could get on with answering them while I ate.

But I had hardly begun to eat when the telephone bell rang, announcing the arrival of a reporter for the usual interview. That business disposed of over a juicy steak, there were more telephone calls—from the conveners of my two Canadian Club meetings, and from trade union leaders in the city who wanted to arrange union meetings. But my schedule was too tight to allow it. The only thing I could do was to refer them to the M.O.I. representative in Ottawa, on the chance that I might be allowed to make a return visit. Nothing came of it. I was tied up in that tight schedule right across Canada, and with every moment of my time so filled that even when, as in this case, local trade union leaders went out of their way to get in touch with me, I was still unable to do anything about it.

It would have been possible, I suppose, for trade unionists to have attended my Canadian Club meetings; but when I once made the suggestion over the telephone, I gathered from the moment of shocked silence at the other end that such things were Not Done. Political feeling seemed even more bitter in Canada than in the States. The only kind of trade unionist who seemed to feel at home at a Canadian Club meeting was one who also held a civic office—and that only in the smaller towns. Out of seventy or eighty meetings I addressed between Vancouver and Quebec there was not one labour or trade union meeting. The nearest I got to anything like a labour group was at Sault St. Marie, where I spoke at a meeting sponsored by a socialist parson, the local C.C.F. candidate.

My Vancouver women's meeting was extraordinarily well attended; there must have been quite a thousand women there. But, as on the island,

I felt I was a flop. Whatever it was the good ladies wanted, I hadn't got it. I could rouse neither active enthusiasm nor active opposition; only what I felt to be cold disapproval. And I can't be sure even of that. No one said anything afterwards, one way or the other. The only woman who referred to my speech at all said she hoped the blitz hadn't destroyed our sense of humour. Which, perhaps, said everything.

The next morning I was told of another change in schedule which involved cutting short the men's lunch meeting and catching a tram-cum-train out to a place called Chilliwack for a women's meeting that evening. It meant only a fifteen-minute speech at the Men's Club, and then a dash to the tram terminus. It seemed hard on the men after they had made arrangements for a big meeting, but, as I was discovering every moment, the mere hint of a wish from a Canadian matron was tantamount to a command.

While I was packing my bags in readiness for the rush to come after lunch, the telephone rang to announce a visitor who described himself as a friend of a close friend of mine in London. It turned out that they had only exchanged a couple of letters in the course of Left Book Club business—my visitor explained this with a smile, adding that he had claimed my friend's friendship in case I should refuse to see him otherwise. Whereupon, he pulled a play of mine from his pocket and asked me to autograph it.

I was extremely flattered by his manner of approach, and more so when I opened the book and saw that he had pasted into it prewar cuttings about me from various American journals. The one I liked best was an article on a news broadcast I had given from London over the Columbia network, just before Munich. The writer, whom I had met while he was in Europe covering the Spanish war, began by pointing out that I was no ordinary taxidriver, and from that proceeded to give me a thoroughly American build-up, concluding with the astonishing statement that my analysis of international affairs was so acute that the British people were not allowed to hear it.

Lacking his faith in my own political abilities, I hadn't thought of offering my services to the British people as a political interpreter. But now that I came to think of it I remembered I had done an interview with A. J. Cummings of the *News Chronicle* for a Paramount News Reel on the same day; that famous news reel which the Foreign Office persuaded the film company to cut, after it had been seen by a few lucky people at the cinemas, of whom I was not one. So there was just a possibility that my American admirer was right. Anyhow, this sort of flattery was a comfort after the previous day's flop, and I lapped it up; especially as my visitor appeared to think it no more than my due.

He shook me a little, however, when he told me he was looking forward to hearing me for himself at the coming meeting. I had to warn him not to expect too much.

As usual with these big city business men's clubs, everything had been

arranged with admirable efficiency—my tram ticket obtained, a cab held ready to rush me to the terminus, and the tram company warned to hold the tram back for me if I should be late.

But the meeting passed off almost too quickly for anything worthwhile. I got up to speak at one and was on my way out at one-fifteen. The audience responded as warmly as did most male audiences, but the ridiculous time limit was discourteous to them and unfair to me. However, it was none of my doing.

The secretary rushed me off to the cab, the cab rushed me to the tram terminus, and I was all aboard and settled at one-twenty-five—dead on the minute that the tram was due to start. Settled, but not comfortably, for the seats were of cane, and there was barely knee room, and the tram was of the kind that go lickety-bump—which is very comical at first, but ceases to be funny long before the end of a four-and-a-half-hour journey.

We started out as tram and trailer, and outside the town became a two-car train on a railroad running alongside a river, with the great mass of the Rockies against the skyline all the way. It was an interesting journey; town giving way to forest and forest to small farms, and then again to hamlet and town. Passing through the biggest town, New Westminster, we became tram and trailer again, and hooked on a third car for what was apparently the local rush hour, dropping it again a few miles further on. And at long last we performed our millionth lickety-bump and reached the end of the line. My relief at this cessation was so intense as to be almost painful.

The woman president of the local club was waiting for me and drove me out to her farm, which lay in flat open country—in the shelter of the mountains, as it seemed, in the fading evening light, though in fact the mountains were still some miles away.

She told me that sixty years ago it had been marshland, and was drained and cultivated by her husband's father, who had built the house. She and her husband were now running it as a dairy farm, with a herd of sixty cows. It was milking-time when we arrived, and I went out to the cowbarn with her husband. He and a boy milked all sixty, by machine.

It was the first time I had seen machine milking. It was a grim business: row upon row of cows with rubber tubes hanging to their teats, being sucked out by an unfeeling mechanical leech. For me, milking a cow is one of life's most sweetly sensuous pleasures, and to see it done by machinery was a cold horror. But milking that herd by hand would have required at least six milkers, whereas by using the machine, and only stripping by hand, a man and a boy could milk, clean up, bed down, and finish everything in an hour and a half.

I would have wanted only six cows, to know and to love each for herself. But that's the difference between keeping cows for business and for pleasure. By modern standards, I could never be more than an amateur cowman—or an amateur anything, for that matter. Being an amateur is

undoubtedly the way to get the best out of life, but it's seldom the way to get a living.

The next morning, Chilliwack began to live up to its name. I came out from the hotel to get my breakfast (as usual in the small towns, no meals were served at the hotel) and met a fierce and freezing gale. I had only a few yards to go to the café, and was wearing an overcoat, but even in that short distance, the wind drove through my clothes as if I had been naked—worse, as if I had been fleshless, too, blowing between ribs and around thighbones as though I were a mere skeleton on a gibbet. The triangular, glass-sided corner café seemed to catch the wind from all sides at once and the windows were so draughty that the central heating seemed to make no difference at all, except perhaps to the women who tended the cooking arrangements inside the circular counter. Returning, shivering, to the hotel, I opened my bag again and put on my thick woollen underclothes. Not that they were any particular comfort out in the wind, as I soon discovered. The wind simply blew through the meshes in the wool, and one's skin went goosey in a thousand tiny breezes instead of bracing itself to resist the gale in the lump.

I had to wait until late afternoon before catching the bus that would bring me to the ferry across the Frazer River and thence to the night train over the Rockies to my next meeting, and I tried to pass the time looking around the town. But the wind was murderous on the streets, and there wasn't much to see; simply the usual small town wooden houses and small town shops whose windows displayed the same American internationally branded goods. I met no congenial spirits either; so after I'd compelled myself to a little exercise I got back to the warmth of my room. There were always letters.

The bus stop was on the edge of the town, out in the open fields, and I was glad to take shelter in a roughly boarded and unpainted cabin beside it. Time went by and no bus appeared, and I began to fear I was waiting in the wrong place. But a small black saloon car had been standing for some time in the road outside, and when I went out to ask the driver about the bus, he informed me that this was it.

It already held five passengers, and looked to me to be full, but he invited me to squeeze in on the back seat, and found room for my bags in the luggage boot behind. I thought then we were full to overflowing, but a few minutes later another passenger arrived and got in; and then, just as the driver pressed the starter, a Chinese man and woman came running up, the woman muffled and swaddled to the eyes, but the man with no more protection against the bitter wind than a reach-me-down jacket and trousers. And somehow they were accommodated, too; the man making a second passenger beside the driver, and the woman squeezing into the back with the rest of us. Then we started off; warm in the mass of our tightly packed bodies, if not exactly comfortable.

Before we had got very far, the bundle that was the Chinese woman

began to make movements that were seemingly not of her volition, and there was a faint whimpering sound. She ignored it for a while; then, since apparently it would not be ignored, undid some of her wrappings and uncovered the head of a baby, and bent her face down close to its face, making queer little comforting noises in what I suppose was Chinese baby talk. No one spoke. (No one spoke, for that matter, throughout the journey, except to tell the driver where to stop. Canadian villagers are like English villagers in that: warily shy with strangers.) Sculptured against that silence, the Chinese mother communing with her baby seemed like the sudden coming to life of a far off oriental world in which, for the moment, neither we, nor the car, nor even Canada, existed.

The car windows soon became frosted over, and in a very short time darkness came down and shut out everything. The car rolled and bounced and jiggled over the rough road; stopping now and again to let out a passenger, until I was the only one left. The driver remarked over his shoulder that it was a bad night, and that ice was forming up in the mountains and coming down the river, and it was doubtful whether the ferry would be able to cross. Which was not at all comforting, especially as I had not yet had my dinner.

However, a little later we bumped slowly over a narrow track leading downhill to the river bank, saw the lights of the ferry ahead of us, and then rolled slowly on to its flat deck. I opened the door of the car and caught a glimpse of the Meccano-like upper works of the ferry-boat moving against a red lamp on the wharf, but the cold was so intense that it beat my curiosity, and I was glad to shut myself in again. A few minutes chugging, and we gently bumped the bank on the other side. The car climbed the slope, bumped along over a mile or so more of rutted lane and finally deposited me alongside the wooden shack that was Agassiz railroad depot. The driver charged me only the standard fifty cents—no more than I had paid for a ride of a couple of hundred yards on Vancouver Island.

I took my bags into the depot, put them in charge of the station agent—who was station-master, ticket-clerk, goods-clerk and porter all rolled into one—and asked him where I could eat. It was then seven-thirty, and the train wasn't due until ten-thirty-five. He said it was a little late for eating, but I might find a café open in the town. He came out with me and pointed his finger across the stretch of intervening darkness toward a line of lighted windows that marked the main and only street.

I stumbled across what felt to be a bit of waste ground until my feet felt hard road, and the lighted windows were near enough to show me a wooden sidewalk. I had the street all to myself. The bitter wind was blowing as furiously as ever. I walked the length of these wooden shacks—there were about twenty in all—without finding out which was the café, for there were no illuminated signs, and though the windows were lit, and without blinds, the buildings were so alike, and the windows so thickly iced up,

that it was impossible to tell from the outside whether a building was shop, café or private house.

At last, I reached the end. The road trailed off into the darkness, toward a black mass of mountain against a lesser blackish sky. I turned back and tried again. The first door I opened was a general shop, and the assistant directed me to try further along. I skipped one or two buildings which I felt almost certain were private houses and tried a door that was between two extra large windows. It opened into a narrow little room, most of which was taken up by a high counter, running lengthwise, behind which was a man in shirtsleeves, and behind him again a row of numbered pigeon-holes on the wall. Against the opposite wall was a tubular iron stove, over which two youngsters, who looked like farm workers or lumberjacks, were warming their hands. It obviously wasn't a café. I couldn't think what it was for a moment or two; and then, seeing a thick book lying open on the counter and a pen and ink beside it, I suddenly grasped the significance of the pigeon-holes, and realized I was standing in the lobby, lounge and reception-hall of the local hotel.

I was well chilled by this time, so instead of asking for the café I asked if they could give me a meal, and the man in shirtsleeves said he'd go and see. He returned to ask if a bit of meat and potatoes would do, and when I said yes, went off again—to warm it up, I suppose, for it was dried and hardened with heating when he brought it. But it was something to eat, and I pulled one of the broken chairs up to the counter and got on with it. My eating was done in heavy silence, for though I tried several times to start a conversation, the others refused to be drawn—even with that wind to talk about. All they would say was that it was a north-east wind, coming off the prairies, and that, if snow fell, there would be a blizzard.

Out on the street again, I found the moon had risen, and I could now see the mountains clearly: a wall of gigantic jagged blue rocks, white-peaked, dominating the universe. I wanted to stand and stare for ever. It was a mighty spectacle. But the bitter wind forced me into the shelter of the railroad depot. The long wooden shack was divided in two: one half, freight shed; the other, waiting-room and ticket office. In the centre of the waiting-room there was the usual tubular stove, with the chimney going straight up and then bending sharply to the horizontal near the roof and going out at the corner. Around three of the walls, was a wooden bench. There was still an hour to wait. I sat down and began to write another letter.

The next time I looked up there were eight of us—five other men, dressed in varieties of the lumberjack's costume, and two women, one of them Chinese. There was no conversation. The room was so quiet that, as I began to write again, the sound of my pen was magnified into disagreeable scratching. And then I realized why; and why I had suddenly been moved to look up. Those seven pairs of eyes were all concentrated on me. I would have much preferred conversation, but the result of my

efforts at the hotel had put me off for the time being—it made me feel too much like a lawyer cross-examining a reluctant witness. I was relieved when the train came in—on time—and I was able to snuggle into the warmth of my reserved Pullman berth.

I woke next morning to a world of wind and snow; a white desolation. I had slept warmly enough, but there was a coating of ice on the window ledge above my bunk; and that in spite of the double storm windows, thick blinds, and a blanket hitched across the window. The porter told me that the temperature had fallen to thirty-seven below zero during the night, and that the engine had frozen up, and had to be thawed out before we could go on. It must have been a murderous night for the engine driver and fireman. We were now, of course, very late. We had been due at my next port of call, Penticton, at seven forty-five that morning. We did not arrive until midday; but the railroad authorities sent a dining car to meet us, so we didn't have to miss our breakfasts.

At Penticton, in a sheltered valley, the temperature was much higher; only four below. Not that I was able to feel the difference until the wind dropped (as it did later in the afternoon) and the sun came out. Then it was very pleasant; at least, it was pleasant inside the saloon car of the man who took me for a tour of the local orchards. Penticton is in the Okanoga valley, which has an annual rainfall of only ten inches. This makes it an ideal place to live in but makes artificial irrigation necessary for its staple industry, fruit growing. The water comes from the mountain streams, and travels in wooden troughs, mounted on trestles. It is induced to flow where required by gravity—a fall of one-tenth of an inch in a hundred feet being sufficient. To cross a road, the trough drops from shoulder height into a pipe under the road, and then rises to shoulder height again on the other side, running along the top of a wall or fence. This upward flow puzzled me until my host explained that the water siphoned under the road and up. It looked the kind of Heath Robinson affair I might have set up in my own garden if I had thought of it; and yet it worked with a commercial efficiency, irrigating all the orchards in the district.

As the next day was Sunday, I had a free evening, but made up for it by two meetings the next day. I awoke to another cold morning with the wind raging again, and driving thinly powdered snow over the roads like white buckshot. I got some amusement out of watching from the in (and warm) side of my bedroom window, two men muffled up to the eyes and wearing great leather mitts, who, after chipping the ice from the switch points on the railroad track alongside the hotel, attempted to drive themselves off on a hand trolley. (A four-wheeled flat trolley running on the rails, and worked by a fore and aft seesaw crank.) They loaded their tools on it, got on themselves, and pumped away at the crank. But the wheels spun round, and the trolley remained where it was, giving a Charlie Chaplin effect. Finally, one of the men got off and gave it a push to start it, and then away they went, bobbing up and down with the motion of the crank

as if they were part of the machine. I have cranked one myself, when I worked as a navvy for the C.P.R. as a young man, and there's nothing more exhilarating than cranking one up to a good lickety-split on a clear track early on a fine summer's morning. I have never tried it at temperatures below zero, but I imagine it isn't bad, once you get warmed up.

The two meetings went off fairly well: High School in the afternoon, and men and women in the evening. These mixed meetings always went well. It was when I addressed women only that I sometimes came unstuck. Afterwards, I spent a pleasant hour in my room with the local C.C.F. leader who had been in the audience, and who told me it was a stroke of genius to send me lecturing to Canadian Clubs. (The C.C.F. is the Canadian equivalent of our Labour Party.)

It was good of him to go out of his way to tell me so, but I wished he could have given me the moral support of his presence at some of those women's meetings, or else arranged for me to have a trade union audience now and again, to renew my spirits. He, like the Vancouver labour leaders, promised to see what he could do about arranging things with the M.O.I. representative in Ottawa, but nothing came of it. And by the time I myself reached Ottawa, I was too tired to argue about it. I had then reached the stage where I forced myself to fulfil the engagements already made for me and, once off the platform, simply flopped. Socially, I was about as gay as a jellyfish. I had been making speeches and meeting new groups of people nearly every day, and sometimes several times a day, for seven months by that time—a feat I should have thought humanly impossible if I hadn't proved it possible in my own by no means energetic person. I could count the good night's sleeps I'd had in that time on the fingers of my two hands. It was like being the candidate at a perpetual general election, in a constituency extending over the whole North American Continent.

I left Penticton early the next morning and spent the day travelling through the mountains. It was impossible to see much from the train, owing to the snow flurry and the frosted windows. All that could be made out was a desolation of wind and snow and rock, and the fact that the train was travelling on a winding track, around and over and through gigantic rocks, and across high trestle bridges between rocks—each rock being anything from a high hill to a mountain. During the whole day's travel, the only human habitations I saw were two lumber camp offices and a railroad depot, consisting of one wooden shack in each case; and one town, consisting of about a hundred wooden houses. As darkness fell, we descended into Castlegar—a run down the mountainside with a thousand-foot precipice at the edge of the track, and a deep lake at the bottom of it. There I changed on to a local line which cut down into a deep valley; a valley so narrow that the train was unable to circle down into it, but had to go forward obliquely down the mountainside as far as it could, and was then switched over on to a second track, and backed down the rest of the way, finishing its journey at a crawl, with engine

bell clanging, right up the centre of the town's main street. This was Trail, famous for its smelter.

I wasn't able to grasp the reason for our several halts and backings at the time, for we entered Trail after dark, and in a snowstorm. But in the brilliant sunshine of the following morning I was able to take in the whole scene; beautiful in its thick coat of dry, powdery snow. I had two towns to visit here: Trail, in the valley, and Rossland, two thousand feet up the mountainside. Trail was packed into two streets, half-a-mile long, with five or six cross streets of about a quarter of a mile. That, with the Columbia River and a small fringe of town on the other side of it, was about all that could be squeezed into the valley. The mountains rose up all round it in precipitous humps.

Most of the buildings were of wood. From different street-corners, you got different ideas about it. Sometimes it was a white little fairy town, sheltered in the deep round bowl of the blue and white mountains, with its own circle of blue sky above—a sunny Shangri La. And then, from another corner, it was a rough, tough, romantic Western mining town; something out of the old silent films. You expected a four-horse stage to come galloping up on the instant, to unload a bunch of roaring miners at the saloon, their pockets bulging with six-shooters and bags of nuggets.

The original mining town was Rossland, now little more than a residential suburb of Trail. In the old days, before the railroad, gold had been discovered up there. The gold rush that followed gave Rossland a population of 20,000, living mostly in tents and huts. Trail was merely the point where the gold seekers landed, after a long voyage up the Columbia River, and took the trail up the mountains to the mines. Hence its name. With the exhaustion of the gold, Rossland had dwindled. But Trail had grown into a commercial centre, and had continued to prosper. Nowadays, its huge smelting plant is its livelihood. It handles all the ore from the mines roundabout, producing lead, zinc and silver.

The smelter was a short distance up the mountainside, there being apparently no room for it on the comparatively level floor of the valley. On the next day, one of the metallurgists showed me over it, during another snowstorm (or snowy flurry, as Canadians call it, meaning merely what we English would call a storm, but which, compared with a Canadian storm, is no more than a little snow in the wind).

What I chiefly remember are some Turneresque pictures: a world of smoke and steam, with grey-faced muscular men in heavy clogs rushing about in the midst of it, doing rapid and skilful things with their hands, and, as it seemed to me, behaving with fine cool courage in circumstances that would have scared me into a paralysis. I might, given time, have got used to the idea of huge pots of molten metal being rushed about in mid-air by travelling cranes; and to jumping out of the way of the trucks of ore, burning slag and the like, that were constantly rushing about over the narrow tracks on the ground; and I might have got used to the thumping

and swishing and pounding, and the sudden bewildering, blinding clouds of steam, in the centre of which I could only stand and tremble, wondering whether it hid a pot of molten metal about to tip on my head or a truck of something worse than death hurtling towards me over the tracks. I might have got used to all this, given time; but I don't think I could ever have felt comfortable about it.

Even in the peaceful parts, like the silver department, Death still stood at one's elbow in the form of virulent acids. No—I didn't like the Smelter. And I couldn't help but feel that, if I'd happened to be born in Trail, or settled there, adult and married, I, too, would have been one of these grey-faced men in clogs. For I don't think I should have had either the temperament or the technical knowledge—and almost certainly not both—to have obtained and held down a white-collar job there. Here again, all my contacts were with major and minor executives, and I got no opportunity of getting to know any of the chaps in the clogs.

That evening stands out in memory as one of the extra-specials. I climbed by car the two thousand feet up to Rossland. There should have been some beautiful views on the way, but darkness had fallen, and the ice on the windows made seeing out impossible, except through the small snow-flecked patch of windscreen that just enabled the driver to see the road. Being able to see so little, I was the more concerned with my ears, which kept bunging up and unbunging, owing to the rapid change in altitude.

When we arrived, I was given a delicious dinner by the local bank manager and his wife, who told me there had been intense competition in the little township for the honour of entertaining me—a competition which they, as fellow-Londoners, were pleased to have won. I say pleased rather than proud, for there wasn't an atom of that ponderously solemn nonsense which so often ruins such an occasion. We simply had a good time together, as though such things as shyness, party manners and keeping up appearances had never been invented.

I would have given a great deal to have been able to spend the whole evening in their company, but I was conscious all the time that I had to make a speech. So I had to go easy on the delicious dinner—no second helpings—and even to say no to a third drink. When the time came to accompany my hosts to the courthouse, where the meeting was to be held, I felt as reluctant as if I had been summoned to stand in the dock. But it was one of those times when all things go well. There was a group of about forty men and women assembled in the little courthouse. And what with the speech and the questions, they kept me at it for over two hours, till I was all given out like a squeezed sponge. Then a dozen of us went off to continue the discussion over a pot of tea at one of the member's houses. Outside, the wind had dropped, the moon was up, and the clean white snow heaped house-high at the sides of the streets. In that company, amid that snowy beauty, it was as though all the dirt and dross of human-kind had fallen away, leaving only the active spirit of lovingkindness and good will.

MAINLY WEAR AND TEAR



My diary records the weather for the next three days as "perishing cold," "very cold," and "cold." This rapid rise in temperature is probably explained by the fact that I was now descending again to the plains, back to Penticton and the Okanoga valley. I returned to the Castlebar junction next morning, in time to catch the eleven-twenty main line train. But it had been delayed by the heavy snow in the mountains. There was nothing to do but sit in the little wooden shack of a waiting-room and wait for it. It was too cold outside to walk about for long. I found a little Chinese café where I got a snack at lunchtime, and then returned to the wooden bench in the waiting-room and read James Hilton's *Without Armour* which, with a little desultory letter writing, lasted me until nine p.m., when the train at long last arrived. I was a very weary traveller when I got on to it. My booking was for a seat in the parlour car. In the crowded condition of the trains, I expected to have to sit up in that seat all night. But, luckily, there was a sleeping berth vacant which I was able to buy from the conductor.

I arrived at Penticton at eight the next morning—with my timetable knocked silly, as I thought. But when I studied it again over breakfast I saw that, by a typist's error, a day had been dropped, as one might drop a stitch in knitting. This dropped day happened to coincide with the present journey, so that instead of being a day out I was a day in—less the nine and a half hours lost at Castlebar and the four and half hours I was about to lose in waiting for a bus connection with the place of the next meeting: Kelowna.

If this sounds complicated, I can only say that it was simplicity itself compared with the rest of my eight single-spaced typewritten pages of speaker's schedule. I don't know whom to admire most: the geniuses who compile these schedules or the poor devils who have to carry them out. What a speaker really needs on a trip like this is a doctor, nurse and secretary. I should have insisted on bringing my wife.

At Kelowna, the hotel was so warm I was able to sit naked in my room—a pleasant experience I was able to repeat several times in Canada (though addressing a meeting in that temperature, fully clothed, was anything but pleasant). I remember the food there, too. The Royal Anne Hotel, Kelowna, was one of the half-dozen hotels out of the hundred or so I stayed at in Canada and the States where eating was specifically a pleasure.

There was a joint meeting of the men's and women's clubs here which, like most such meetings, went very well.

The next morning I took another bus to Vernon where I did two meetings, the women in the afternoon and the men in the evening. What I chiefly remember is adjourning after the men's meeting with a few congenial spirits, and discussing "why Englishmen don't get on in Canada" over some excellent rum. The general opinion was that many Englishmen failed because they were too "superior," and spoke in a condescending tone—the B.B.C. announcer tone which makes Canadians spit blood. I was asked again and again in Canada (where many of the B.B.C. news programmes are rebroadcast by the C.B.C.) why we insisted on putting those insufferably condescending voices on the air.

My explanation that the tone was no more than an accent, and what the B.B.C. calls a standard English accent, was not accepted. It was impossible to shake their conviction that the B.B.C. accent was the expression of the speaker's feeling of superiority. And they hated it—and him.

When I returned home, however, I found it equally impossible to convince people on this side that the normal announcing accent could have any such effect. Coming back home after being abroad for nine months was an education in itself. Never before had I realized the insularity of the English. We ourselves had been conditioned by the habit of twenty years to accept the B.B.C. accent as the voice of God. We therefore liked it. If other people didn't like it, it only showed their ignorance. And the B.B.C., so far from being blamed for going on giving it to them, was to be congratulated. It would do them good.

Personally, listening in Canada to the B.B.C. with an ear now attuned to American accents, I found I liked an educated Yorkshire best. It was clear, friendly, manly in vowel sound, and representatively British. British in *fibre*—which is something the smooth announcer accent can never be.

But I'm inclined to think listeners blame accents far too much for their dislikes. Few people in these printsoaked times appreciate the difference between the written and the spoken word. Few even of our radio chiefs have yet realized that writing for the ear and writing for the eye are two separate and distinct arts, and that skill in the one is no guarantee of skill in the other.

That some of our radio men do have the necessary knack, seems to be one of life's lucky accidents. But even then they sometimes find themselves with an immediate superior who judges a script without an ear, and without hearing it spoken, and so automatically chooses academic prose as against vivid talk.

The listener (who has far more interesting things to do than study theories of radio technique) is aware only of the strain and irritation of listening, and his consequent dislike of what he is listening to—personified by the reader whom he accordingly blames. At least, the transatlantic listener blames the reader. We in this country have been so conditioned

to a blind acceptance of the B.B.C. style that if we find it difficult to follow we blame neither the reader nor the writer, but our own lack of "culture." And mutts that we are, we stand silently by, suffused with humble and self-conscious blushes, while our vigorous English talk-language is emasculated. No one who spends most of his time among manual workers, as I do can fail to notice the rotting effect of this stuff on the common speech. Even the street urchins are beginning to "ascertain the whereabouts of the local constabulary" instead of looking out for the cops.

But, in wartime, the B.B.C. men put much of the blame on official communiqués, to alter a sacred word of which, without special permission, amounts to something like treason. And, even allowing for a shower of lucky accidents, it would be too much to expect that many government officials should have an ear for plain speech. Their whole training has been in the opposite direction. Nor do they always realize what radio is. As the War Office General said to the B.B.C. news editor who asked permission to change "Italian battalions" to "Italian troops" because it would be better for reading aloud: "Oh, you read 'em *aloud*, do you? In our club, y'know, we stick 'em up on a green baize board thing."

If only it were all as simple as Italian battalions the radio writer's job would be easy. But official pronouncements, like official promises, seem often to be worded with deliberate obscurity, and any attempt by common men to put them into plain English is apt to be regarded by their authors with extreme, and sometimes vindictive, disfavour. (And not only by their authors. Societies for the protection of vested interests, particularly in property, often have a vicious hatred of plain English and, when they hear it, raise powerful hell behind the scenes—as I have reason to know.)

But, as I say, my efforts to explain something of this to Canadian listeners were not successful. They still preferred to blame the announcer. Hitler ruled Germany by blaming the Jew. The statesman who discovers something small, compact, solid, seeable, hearable, yet for ever out of reach, for all mankind to put the blame on, will rule the world. What we need is a universal electric hare.

From British Columbia, I went on over the Rockies into the prairies of Alberta and Saskatchewan. The distances between stops were now much longer, the winter weather bitter, the trains often late because of it, and my schedule tighter than ever. So I had very little time for gadding about or getting to know people.

The prairie provinces remain with me chiefly as a blur of flat and snowy wastes, swept by a murderous wind, across which I rushed; either gasping for breath in an overheated train, or stumbling out of it into the icy darkness, hours late, to be grabbed and rushed off again by a worried local secretary in a car or sledge to the waiting audience that had almost given me up. Sometimes I had eaten on the train, sometimes not. In any case there was no time to eat now. It was straight into the speech.

Then back to the station, either very late that night or very early the

next morning—a good night's sleep missed in either case—to pace the icy, windswept wooden platform for an hour or more, in dwindling hope of the expected train.

It wasn't all as bad as that, of course; but that's the composite picture that remains in my memory.

Experienced long-distance travellers tell me one of their chief troubles is constipation. Mine wasn't. Everything inside me protested violently against these goings-on. Only the mind remained completely master of itself, murmuring sympathetically: "Poor old guts! Poor old guts!" but keeping determinedly on. Whether it was the irregular meals, or train and hotel cooking, or simply nerves, I don't know; but, for my stomach (which gives no trouble at all at home) the whole tour was an aching and quivering misery. Train and hotel cooking in Canada was no better and no worse than in the States. Nor was either generally better than English hotel cooking. What made American cooking often seem better was the greater variety of dishes, and, of course, the many raw green salads (though these were often ruined, to my taste, by messy dressings). But for real eating, for food that was food and not mere massproduced belly-filler, you had to be invited to the home of a cook.

I was seldom lucky enough to be so invited, since nearly every dinner, off the train, was a spouting occasion, and hence a "do" in a hotel. My two most glorious meals in Canada were cooked by doctors' wives—one at Port Alberni in Vancouver Island, and the other at Barrie, Ontario. And parsons' wives ran them very close, both in Canada and the States. My own tip to the traveller who has time to spare is to ignore all recommendations to hotels and restaurants and seek out the local doctors and parsons. If you make yourself sufficiently agreeable, one of them is almost sure to invite you home. But beware of college professors. Their wives are sometimes professors, too; and cooking, like all the arts, requires the single-minded devotion of the artist.

As for most of the American luxury hotels and restaurants—my wife could feed me better on fifty bob a week. The same goes for most of the luxury London restaurants that I've tried. The food's dead. There's no taste in it.

The trouble with the cheaper sort of Canadian cafés, especially in the smaller towns, was that most of them were run by Chinese who, however good they may have been with their own dishes, had no interest whatever in Western food; nor, for that matter, in their Western customers. The premises themselves were usually depressing to begin with. The outside would often be all aglitter with chromium plate, but the inside, although it had obviously once been equally bright and glittering, perhaps two or three years previously, when the café had first opened, would now be neglected and dirty. And there's nothing more depressing than an interior of mirrors and chromium plate that someone has obviously ceased to care for. A dirty old shack is just a dirty old shack, where the tablecloths

may be mucky but the food first-rate. There's nothing inherently depressing about it. But the new and should-be bright, smeared with a thin film of filth, is disgusting. You begin to wonder about the kitchen. And when the slatternly Chinese boy, in shirtsleeves, greyish apron, and trousers shiny with grease, comes ambling slowly up to take your order, and throws on the table a damp and greasy knife and a fork brown-stained between the prongs, you begin to wish you'd kept on walking.

The boy accepts your order without interest. It is useless to ask his advice about it, for if you do he merely repeats the typewritten list on the menu, beginning at the beginning and going on to the end, without expression and without comment; as though he's learned off a list of meaningless syllables—which perhaps he has.

You decide to play for safety and order ham and eggs; which, in Canada, usually includes potatoes. He goes off with the same drugged air, calls your order down the hatch in the far wall, and then retires behind his counter and apparently goes off into a trance. After a while, you hear the lift arrive. He hears it too and, still without interest, goes to it, lifts out your meal and brings it to you—eggs burnt on the underside and cold at the yoke, soggy Canadian streaky bacon, neither cooked nor exactly raw, and a slop of fried up mashed potato, burnt, like the eggs, on the underside and, at the centre, cold.

If there is anything else you fancy, now is the time to ask, for once he goes back to his counter he is finished with you. For him, you have ceased to exist. You will never wake him again until you walk up to pay. I wondered once or twice what would be the effect if I got up and walked out without paying, but I never quite screwed up the courage to try.

Now that I come to set this down—and the picture, though a composite one, is true to a greater or lesser degree of some dozen or so small town cafés I visited—it occurs to me that perhaps the boy's dreamlike state was in fact the result of drugs. Or chronic overwork. But even that doesn't explain the food. And the most amazing thing about it was that no enterprising Italians or Greeks had set up rival cafés. Or, if they had, I didn't have the luck to find them. The Chinese seemed to have a monopoly in the small towns.

My best café meal was at Edmonton. I arrived there at six-thirty in the morning, was unable to get a hotel room, and unable to make contact with the good ladies who were running my meeting there. So until the meeting time, three p.m., there was nothing to do but wander around the town. It would have been pleasanter, I think, in summer, but though there was plenty of snow underfoot there was at least none falling.

I spent an hour in a barber's to begin with, listening to the local gossip and finally getting my hair cut. But that once done, there was no excuse to linger, so I walked along the main street, looking at the shops, and trying to get the feel of the place. But, outwardly, one North American town is very much like another; especially its shop-windows. The only

way you can get the feel of it is by meeting some of the people, and in this I failed, except for my short time in the barber's. Finally, the penetrating wind reminded me of the worn and shabby state of my English overcoat; and as I was near the local Eaton Department Store, I thought I might as well go in and have a bit of warmth, and possibly get a new coat.

I spent some hours in there, looking round, and having a snack at the quick-lunch counter (which was neither better nor worse than that of most big department stores) and came out just in time for my meeting, with a new coat and hat.

The meeting went off very well. I actually got some questions, which was rare from a women's audience. But after I had taken a cup of tea with the women's committee and said good-bye to everybody, it was still only five o'clock, and I had another five and half hours before my train was due to leave. What I would have liked was a bed, as my previous night's journey had allowed me only four hours sleep.

However, since there was no bed to be had, I did the next best thing and went into a cinema where, comfortably seated, I sank into a very pleasant semi-doze—aware that I was being entertained by an all-singing, all-dancing, all-technicolour musical, but aware also that there was no need to take any notice of it. It is one of the pleasantest sensations for the weary mind that I know of, but you have to be wearied beyond caring first; otherwise it's no more soothing than a tin can on a dog's tail.

I came out into the darkened streets, some two hours later, in the mood to do myself proud in the way of a meal; and saw a large and crowded café whose outside effect was red, both in paint and Neon sign. Experience had by this time taught me that "good cooking was far more likely to go with red paint than with chromium plate, so I went straight in. There was steak on the menu, and though North American steaks, even at their best, are usually a disappointment after English steaks, I never lost hope; and this time, as nearly always when there was the opportunity, I ordered it—underdone, or as Americans say: "rare."

The waitress, a nice girl who seemed interested in food, asked me if I would also like it "sizzling." And as she evidently felt it would be a good idea I said I would—though if "sizzling" meant to her what it had always meant to me, I couldn't think how she was going to manage it. But when, in a few minutes time, she brought it, it was sizzling as fiercely as an angry cat; and it continued to sizzle even after she had set it down on the table before me.

This apparent marvel was simple enough from the cooking point of view, though I imagine it called for exceptional dexterity in the waitresses during the rush hours. The steak was heated on a thick iron platter, and then served in this, instead of being transferred to a dish or a china plate. The idea was a new one to me; nor have I since come across any other café using it, either in this country or in America.

From the speaking point of view, my Canadian tour continued to be

up and down. I was a great success at the mixed meeting at Banff and a flop at the women's meeting at Calgary. Then up to moderate success at Edmonton, and continuing on that level through the smaller towns of North Battleford, Biggar, and Saskatoon, rising higher at Prince Albert (where I was made a great fuss of) and sinking a little at Moose Jaw. Then I ran into an almost royal reception at Regina. So far from expecting me to fend for myself between speeches, they had booked me a whole suite in the best hotel: my most splendid lodging in the whole North American continent. The pity of it was I could spend so little time there; not even long enough to have a full night's sleep in the lovely bed—let alone make use of the settee, desk and other luxurious furnishings of the sitting-room,

I had done a lunch meeting at Moose Jaw, and did not arrive at Regina until three in the afternoon. There I had a dinner meeting in the evening and a women's meeting later; and I had to catch a train out early in the morning. The dinner meeting was arranged by the Regina Board of Trade, and everybody who was anybody in the town and district seemed to be present, including the Mayor and aldermen, the local Air Force and Army commanders, the trade union leaders, and, of course, the local business men. It was good to see everyone together for once.

It was a big meeting and an extremely friendly audience; certainly one of the ups. It was, too, obviously the kind of audience where the questions and discussion would have been the most worthwhile part of the meeting, but unfortunately there was no time for more than a speech. I had to rush off to the women's meeting. That was the kind of thing I resented—tough on me, and unfair to both audiences, since I could give neither their full whack. Admittedly, in the case of Regina, both audiences were big ones, but even so it should surely have been possible for them to have amalgamated if they'd had a mind to. The women suffered most on this occasion since, being my third audience that day, they got the dog-tired fag end of me. And I was the more sorry about that because the woman who presided gave me the most understanding, and what I can only call affectionate, introduction I've ever had.

From there I went back on my tracks to Medicine Hat, arriving the following evening (late for the meeting) at eight; doing the meeting and catching the Eastbound train out again at one a.m. I ached for the U.S. roomette, where I could have gotten a little sleep in the daytime.

The next stop was Winnipeg. I had several days there, but only two speeches to make. I'd collected a buster of a cold hanging about on the midnight platform at Medicine Hat, and with it a bigger than usual dose of self-pity, so I was thankful to creep into my comfortable bed at the Fort Garry, knowing I could sleep in it for three successive nights.

I have heard the spirit of Winnipeg described as being like a bracing wind. All I can say is that I'm glad the spirit of Winnipeg toward me was nothing like the freezing gale I found blowing there. It blew against the

wall of the hotel all night long, in a steady, continuous roar, like a train in a tube tunnel; and five minutes of facing it out of doors in the daytime made death seem a happy release.

But the hotel was so overheated that I was driven to break the strict rules and open my window a crack. The roaring wind came in with a rush that threatened to wreck the furniture. I quickly shut it again. Then, an hour or so later, feeling unable to breathe, I tried again, with the same result. Finally, I worked out a compromise. I turned the heater in the bathroom full on, so as to prevent the pipes from freezing (I hoped) and then opened the bathroom window about an inch; and in this way got sufficient draught round the edges of the bathroom door to keep my bedroom at a tolerable temperature.

But as for the spirit of Winnipeg—how could anyone connect it with any kind of wind? On my first day there, I asked a man whether one had to get a licence to obtain whisky in the town, and another man overheard me, and both told me to leave it to them, and the next morning I was sitting on my bed undoing two parcels: one containing a bottle of the best Haig and Haig, and the other, two bottles of the Hudson's Bay Company's "Best Procurable." You can call that generous hospitality if you like; I call it pure altruism.

One of the institutions in the States that I missed most in Canada was the British Consular Service. In almost any United States town of any size there was a British Consul to make one welcome and soften the edges of the wartime traveller's worries. In Winnipeg there was, of course, no consul, but there was a British Trade Commissioner, and he looked after me like an uncle. What was even better, he was a congenial spirit.

There was also a wealthy American wheat-broker. He and I were violent political enemies. But while we damned each other's politics, he was taking me round the town, waving the wand of his influence and producing such miracles as a new pair of spectacles (with by no means simple lenses) finished in a few hours, and the paper-problems of my future re-entry into the States settled at the U.S. Consulate in as many minutes.

When we parted, after a three-hour all out argument at his house, he told me he'd willingly give his life and his whole fortune to help prevent a socialist world. All the same, I liked him. There wasn't an ounce of cant or hypocrisy in the whole lean length of him.

I left Winnipeg reluctantly. And as things turned out I think I should have done better to have stayed there until I was thoroughly rested. But I felt it was up to me to carry out the schedule—short of absolute physical collapse. And while that would have been the right course if I'd been driving a bus or working in a munitions factory, I don't think it was the right course for a public speaker. When you're on the platform you've got to be supernormal, larger than life, if you're going to move your audience. If you are so tired and ill as to have become unable to lift yourself above the subnormal, you'd best stop for a while. You are

probably doing more harm than good to the cause you represent, since your audience will judge that cause by you.

However, I didn't see it as clearly and impersonally as that at the time. I simply felt that if I fulfilled my engagements and it killed me I could at least die happy, whereas if I didn't fulfil them, I should have to live on with the consciousness of yet another failure. So instead of sensibly shutting my mouth for a fortnight or so, and starting out again renewed and fit to be heard, I kept on. At the next town I managed to get along all right at the men's meeting, thanks to the responsiveness of the audience and the many questions; but at the women's meeting I must have reached an all-time low. When I finished speaking, the woman president said: "I could shake you!" She didn't go on to say why, and I was too far gone to ask her. But it occurs to me now that if only she had explained, she might have cleared up the whole problem of my several failures at women's meetings.

A woman friend who knew these women's audiences intimately, and who was present at one of my meetings, suggested it was because I was "too friendly to Labour." But if that was so, why didn't someone rise and denounce me? Then we could have had a grand meeting.

From Winnipeg to Ottawa, it was much the same—up and down. The ups were mainly men's and mixed meetings; the downs mainly women's. The extraordinary thing about this part of the country was the number of parsons who came to my meetings and who, much to my surprise—for I don't believe in their creed—warmly approved of me. I began to look out for a clerical collar in the audience, and to be encouraged when I saw one, for I knew I could almost certainly count on the parson to make the questions and discussion worthwhile. By reason of their cloth, apparently, they were privileged to attend women's meetings, and at one place two of them turned what I expected to be a flop into a moderate success. It seemed that in Canada, if you wanted to find the local fount of pugnaciously progressive thought, you went to the parsonage. To which it seems safe to add that if you want to be certain of success at a Canadian women's meeting, either be a parson or take a parson with you.

Stayner stands out in memory as the place where the town council did me the honour of postponing their own meeting to come to mine. Barrie was the place where I had a glorious dinner (at a doctor's house), and between which, and Stayner, I passed through Utopia—its station a little wooden shack from which you hung out a flag if you wanted to stop the train.

At Toronto, I got along well, I thought, with a large audience of women at the Eaton auditorium; but felt, during the tea that followed, that the committee disapproved of me.

I had no opportunity to see much of Ottawa. There was only time for two good meetings, tea with Malcolm MacDonald (and the most delightful person I met on the whole trip, his sister Sheila) and then off again, to do

some of the smaller towns around and about before going on to Quebec. I had a whole day in Quebec, and only one meeting, and hoped to see something of the city. But there was a snowstorm that day, so I had to be content with seeing what I could from the upper windows of the luxurious Chateau Frontenac. It wasn't much, owing to the blurring effect of the falling snow, but it was enough to make me realize what I was missing. I should have liked at least a week there, if only to have got better acquainted with the witty French-Canadian chairwoman of the mixed meeting.

My last speech in Canada was at Montreal, a women's group which seemed to find me interesting. And afterwards I got on splendidly with the committee: congenial spirits, every one.

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TROOPSHIP



I NOW hoped for a rest, but though I assured the darling but implacable girl who arranged the schedules that I was no longer fit to be heard, the speeches and radio talks went on. I arrived in New York from Canada one morning to find a radio talk had been arranged for me that very evening—a talk that had to be scripted. The next day there was another meeting; the day after, another. Even on the Sunday I had to do a Y.M.C.A. breakfast meeting before I could call myself free. Then on the Monday, I was off to Philadelphia, for a magnificent C.I.O. meeting; then for a week in Boston; then on through Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, doing small towns, until finally I had to see a doctor who told me I had a temperature of a hundred and three, ordered me to bed, and suggested I should take advantage of the local hospital.

But I had another meeting to do that night, and it was much too late to telephone to New York for a substitute, so I felt it was up to me to carry on. And I did; and had a first-rate meeting. I then felt entitled to catch the midnight train to New York, get to a hotel and flop. Which I also did. But when I woke up at three in the afternoon and was examined again, the hotel doctor couldn't find anything wrong with me. So after two days' rest, I picked up my schedule again at Chicago; resolved not to do more than one meeting a day for a while—a resolution which I had to break, of course, almost as soon as I made it.

My time was now nearly up. I came back to New York, still hoping

for an American holiday before I left; my hopes being based mainly on the stories I had heard of people, even important officials, who had to wait weeks for a plane or ship. But to my secret disappointment, there was no difficulty whatever about finding accommodation for me. I must have been an extremely high priority customer. The whole business was arranged in a few days—days too full of form filling and waiting about in the shipping and customs offices to leave much time for holidaymaking. I did, however, make use of a Sunday that intervened to take a look at New York from the top of the Empire State Building, as I described earlier. I did not see Manhattan's skyline from the sea, nor did I see the Statue of Liberty; for I had entered New York by train, and when I left it by ship, we put to sea some time during the night, while I was asleep.

I came back more stylishly than I went out—in the *Queen Elizabeth*—though as there were also many thousands of U.S. troops on board, I had rather less space.

They were a good warm crowd to be with. I spent several happy days pushing along the crowded decks, and finding myself among friends wherever I stopped. They came from all over the States. Many of them had never seen the sea before. And all were curious about the country they were going to. Most of those who asked me about it thought of England as a country of Coroneted Lords and lowly serfs. So I had plenty to tell them. One man asked me if there were any factories in England. And on my telling him there were, he said he had thought we made everything by hand. (I'll swear he wasn't kidding.)

I was, of course, able to point to the *Queen Elizabeth* as one of the little knick-knacks we manufactured. I'm not sure I was believed on that point. No one disputed it, but I got the idea many of them felt that only America could have built so big and beautiful a ship; and that, if she was British, as seemed evident from the British crew, then America must have given it to us under Lend-Lease. At all events, no one that I met seemed interested in her British origin. Nor was there any particular reason why they should have been—only I felt a little peeved that our one "biggest in the world" should receive no acclamation from these American admirers of bigness.

The ship's organization was a first-rate advertisement for the country they were coming to. So, too, was the voice of the ship's officer explaining to us over the loudspeaker system that we were now entering the war zone, the danger zone, and that it was therefore necessary for us to take certain precautions. It was a firm, calm, full-bodied voice, friendly and reassuring; a voice that left no doubt in the minds of men newly come to war that they were indeed in the danger zone and could no longer treat safety rules lightly, and yet at the same time made them feel the odds were in their favour. That voice, I felt, could hardly fail to shake the Lord-and-serf superstition; it was so obviously the voice of a man talking to his comrades. We became very familiar with it during the voyage.

But my hopes for its lasting effect were dashed when we arrived at the "northern port." Someone gave us an official welcome—someone representing Britain. I don't know who he was. We heard only the voice over the loudspeaker Aw'f'ly Landed Gentry. Landed Gentry acknowledging the presence of the lower orders. Landed Gentry on his way to lunch, but feeling it his duty to stop and say a word to these American fellers. Sort of thing one's position forced upon one—like opening bazaars. Embarrassing at times. But one had to keep a stiff upper lip and go through with it. Fellers probably not listening, anyhow. Get it over as quickly as possible. Hah! And now to lunch.

I looked round at the faces of the listening men. They were expressionless. I don't think they were disappointed. It was so exactly what their American notions of Britain had led them to expect.

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WHAT NOW?



BACK home, after nine months' absence, I found myself very much a stranger from foreign parts. It took me some time to get acclimatized; to adjust myself to the difference in the social atmospheres. I've explained about that in the chapter on Chicago. I now wanted to reverse the statement of the man in the Chicago train, and say if I hadn't been born an Englishman I should have wanted to be an American.

But that's by the way. The important question at the moment is the global one: what are the chances of American co-operation in the post-war world? As a socialist, I came home feeling less optimistic than when I set out—both about the U.S. and about my own country. I had left a country still in the glorious co-operative mood of the danger years. I came back to a country that had "come to its senses"—a country where the master had permitted himself to become friendly with the servant in the air-raid shelter, but who, now that they had come up again, was finding it necessary gently to remind the servant that they were, after all, master and servant, and not simply two men together, as the servant had rashly supposed.

The war with the Axis was yet to be won, but the dispositions for the renewal of the age-long war between the Haves and the Have-Nots were already being made. And if the Haves managed to hold on to their pre-war power, as they obviously had every intention of doing, we should be foolish

to count on a more progressive British policy in international affairs. There might be some slight advance on last time; but there was nothing to justify optimism about it. Winning the war would mean for British socialists simply that they had saved their political skins, and were now at liberty to take up the struggle again. It wouldn't of itself advance their cause one iota.

So far as international socialism was concerned; the war, by exacerbating nationalist feelings, has probably put the clock back. Even Russia has now been forced into the adoption of a narrowly nationalistic policy, and its inculcation into the minds of the Russian people.

My last meeting in the States was a gathering of New York business men at which the speakers were official representatives of the smaller European countries. I was the only unofficial speaker present. The question we were asked to speak on was: "After the War, What?" I was the only one who mentioned world co-operation. The other speakers either waved their national flags and stressed their determination to maintain their national pre-war structures at all costs, or else carefully avoided politics altogether.

The American who summed up, an influential journalist, congratulated them on their determination to stand fast by their national sovereignty; said it was obviously the "realistic" course, and that he hoped Americans would have the good sense to follow their example. As for me—well, my idealism was to be commended, of course. But we had to face facts. And the facts were that world co-operation, carried to its logical conclusion, meant lowering ourselves to the level of the African Zulu and the Tibetan peasant. And we surely weren't going to throw away the hard won benefits of our splendid American civilization for that? (Loud and prolonged applause.)

He represented an extremely powerful body of American opinion; perhaps the most powerful, in terms of money. And his line of argument is one that tends to appeal to Americans of all groups. Idealism is fine and good; we are all idealists at heart; let us practise it by all means—in the way of private charity, in giving the poor and downtrodden an occasional hand-out. But when it comes to international politics we've got to face facts. We live in a wicked world, a world greedily jealous of our splendid American civilization, and we are compelled, therefore, to regard every other country with suspicion, and to avoid all entangling alliances. Any co-operation with other countries could only be to their gain and our loss. The most we can safely do is to give them an occasional hand-out.

That, of course, is America in a "realist" mood. America in a generous mood is capable of the most surprisingly co-operative gestures. And these national moods are apt to change from day to day. Which makes the assessment of possible American policy extremely difficult.

American liberals are anti-British "ruling class," which tends to make them anti-British everything. American Big Business sees Britain chiefly

as a business rival in the world market, a rival who, from a strictly business point of view, would be better down the drain. Americans with a desire for world co-operation, though there may be many of them, are not at present organized into a strong body of opinion; they therefore tend to be ineffective. The fact that conscious world co-operators like Roosevelt and Henry Wallace occupy such powerful positions in American government is one of history's lucky accidents—lucky for both America and the world. But already Roosevelt has been compelled to make Wallace step out of the vice-presidential chair and to put the far more conservative Truman in his place—the point being, obviously, that the Democratic Party bosses feared Roosevelt would lose the 1944 election if coupled with so frank a liberal as Wallace (for, of course, if Roosevelt died in office Wallace would have automatically become president).

The greatest hope I see in the States is the C.I.O. The C.I.O., of course, did not set out to be a group for the encouragement of world co-operation, but simply a collective-bargaining instrument for the workers in the mass-production industries. It has, however, been organized mainly by socialists, whose faith has permeated its whole structure, and who have themselves been forced up by the power of the organization they have created into positions of local labour leadership all over the country. That does not mean the C.I.O. is socialistic. The socialists in the C.I.O. have had to be content with preaching collective bargaining, and will probably have to remain content with that for some time to come. (In the States, "socialism" is still a wicked word, suggesting bombs, whiskers and "free love." Even the American Communist Party has announced its conversion to Capitalism, and formally dissolved itself.) But because so many of these C.I.O. organizers believe in socialism they have, perhaps unconsciously, induced in their active membership at least a receptivity toward the socialist approach. My C.I.O. audiences were the only groups where I consistently found the idea of world co-operation received with enthusiasm.

The new C.I.O. Political Action Committee may become the rallying point for the at present ineffective and scattered liberal and socialistic opinion in the States, and so become a powerful factor in the American approach to world affairs. But it's too early to count on it yet.

If I were a British diplomat I'd be going all out for European co-operation right now, so as to be able later on to offer America the opportunity of coming into the warm or staying out in the cold. Americans have got it firmly fixed in their heads that international co-operation for them means giving all and getting nothing. The only way to convince them, as a nation, that it isn't so, is to show them. And the only way we'll show them is by offering them the benefit of our co-operation as a United Europe.

However, it doesn't look at the moment of writing as if things are going to pan out that way. It looks much more as though the European continent is going to be divided up among the Allies into exclusive "spheres of influ-

ence," with an eye to our respective dispositions for the next war; and with the further complication that inside those spheres of influence all the old nationalistic prejudices, exacerbated by this war, will be constantly exploding.

It looks as though there will be two self-sufficient Great Powers: Capitalist America and Communist Russia, with ourselves as a sort of balanceweight between. This may give us an important role in the preservation of world peace for a time, particularly if we have a Labour Government. But I can't see that it brings us appreciably nearer to permanent world co-operation.

I don't think the U.S. will go entirely isolationist again. But it seems to me quite likely they will go through an imperialist phase. It is just possible, of course, that America and Russia will co-operate, but I don't think it is probable. Already the American "realists" are planning on the supposition that co-operation is impossible. They point with a nudge and a wink at the Alaska Highway, and tell you it's the key to the next war. Canada would then become another Poland.

No—for those of us who believe that some form of world socialism is the only possible foundation for the civilized life, the immediate outlook is not good. But I see no reason to be overly cast down because of it. Spengler's pessimistic prophecies have turned out to be correct, up to a point; but they prove only that we've got to go beyond that point. Personally, I'm an optimistic pessimist. I like to face the worst, but I see no reason to change my objectives because of it.

If there is one thing experience teaches us, it is that we can only get what we want the hard way—by valuing it more highly than ourselves and putting all we've got into the struggle for it; even if it means a life and death struggle with those of our fellowmen who think differently. From a god's-eye view this may seem ridiculous, or tragic, or both. But it's the only way we humans know. A little more commonsense, one feels, a little more sweet reasonableness (such a little more) and we ourselves might be as gods. But we haven't got that little more. Or not yet. So we have to keep on plugging on, the hard human way. And if we sometimes feel we fall too hopelessly short of being gods ever to be able to build a civilized world, we can at least reflect that we haven't done so badly to date for monkeys.

Meanwhile, whatever happens in the immediate future, one thing's certain: there'll always be plenty of good work waiting to be done—right in our own street.

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